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AUSTRALIA AT THE FRONT







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[Norw

THE AUTHOR

'Australia at the Front'

Frontispiece

Australia at the Front

A Colonial View of the Boer War

By

FRANK WILKINSON

(Special Correspondent. *Daily Telegraph*, Sydney; also acting for *Adelaide Advertiser* and *Melbourne Age*)

Illustrated by

NORMAN H. HARDY

From Sketches and Photographs by the Author



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P R E F A C E

As to the pages which follow, I do not propose to make any lengthy apology. They are a record in brief of personal impressions and experiences during ten months' association with Australian troops in South Africa. So far as I have been able to judge, during the few weeks spent in England while preparing this volume for the press, the general public not only *wants* to know what Australia has done for the Empire in this crisis, but is anxious to give her a full measure of credit for it.

Through force of circumstances our troops—even those hailing from the same colony—were split up into more or less minute fragments, and operated, during the major portion of the campaign, with columns hundreds of miles apart, making it quite impossible for any one man to keep in touch with more than one section at a time.

I have not attempted to cover the *whole* of the ground traversed by the Australians: only a part of it—that part as to which I happened to have

Preface

personal knowledge. I have passed lightly over incidents and engagements in which we were not immediately concerned, preferring to deal with what I have seen rather than what I have heard. For this reason I have not touched upon the Stormberg or Natal phases of the campaign.

On the other hand, as will be apparent from a glance forward, it so happens that we bore a part in most of the principal actions fought during the historic march from Modder River to Pretoria. Since then, we have operated under different commands, over a large portion of the Transvaal and Free State, to the east of the railway line. I leave it to the reader to determine in what manner the Australians have acquitted themselves.

My thanks-in-chief are due to Mr Watkin Wynne (Manager) and the Directors of the *Daily Telegraph*, Sydney, for facilities afforded in the publication of this volume; also to Sir Langdon Bonython, proprietor of the *Adelaide Advertiser*, and Mr David Syme, proprietor of the *Melbourne Age*, which papers I represented during the campaign.

LONDON, December 1900.

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Australia at the Front

CHAPTER I

PRELIMINARIES

AUSTRALIA to England :—“May we help you with troops in South Africa ?”

England to Australia :—“Thanks very much. You may send a few—not too many, because this is a serious business and we have no time to look after a lot of untrained men just now. However, we must give some of your people a chance of seeing active service. It will strengthen ‘those silken bonds’; and if you send small units of 125 each, so that they may be readily attached to Imperial troops, we will try and keep an eye on them for you. We are allowing Canada to send a contingent, and we must treat you all alike.”

That was the spirit, if not the text, of Mr Chamberlain’s reply to our proposal; but we didn’t haggle over the phraseology.

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An epidemic of war fever set in. It prostrated the whole continent, and even affected — most violently too — the little island of Tasmania. Hardly a soul in New Zealand escaped. The military Commandants, sent by their respective Governments, assembled in Melbourne, discussed the situation from every point of view, and decided to recommend the equipment and despatch of an elaborate Federal force, complete in all details and ready to take the field as an independent unit. But before this very excellent recommendation reached the various Governments, Mr Chamberlain had settled the matter by another cable message.

The British Government would like us to send a couple of units, each 125 strong, from each of the colonies — "infantry preferred." Australia was to defray the cost up to the time that the troops landed in South Africa, when they would be paid by the Imperial Government at Imperial rates. A specified number of Special Service officers was also sanctioned.

In face of these definite instructions the broad Federal idea was dropped. Each colony began looking round for ships to get its little contingents oversea ahead of its neighbours. Thousands volunteered where only hundreds could possibly be accepted. Middle-aged men and old, to all appearances quite sane, sud

Preliminaries

denly discovered that in their salad days they had held commissions in some long-forgotten volunteer corps in the "back-blocks." Squatters and solicitors, bank directors and dock labourers, lawyers and lamplighters, joined in the rush.

The N.S.W. Government was in a difficulty. Parliament happened to be in recess ; and the Premier, Mr W. J. Lyne (now Sir William), had given his word that nothing definite should be done without legislative sanction. He had just assumed the reins of government. He was besieged with applications ; he was urged on all sides to push the thing through and get the troops to the front, but he refused to bind himself to anything. All the same he had everything in readiness, so that immediately Parliament said "Yes" he could proceed with the embarkation. Parliament met. The Premier submitted his proposals, which contemplated the despatch of one unit of Mounted Infantry and one of infantry proper—the last in deference to Mr Chamberlain's request.

But the other branches of the service rebelled. We had a permanent battery of Artillery, completely equipped with the most modern guns, which our Commandant, Major-General French, was very keen on sending. We also possessed a most efficient and thoroughly up-to-date Medical Corps, which our

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P.M.O., Colonel Williams, strongly insisted on taking out; and finally, we had a detachment of Lancers, then at Aldershot, whose services had already been accepted.

As to the latter, one does not care to say much. The manner of their volunteering seems to have been very much on the lines of a tale told about an American General in the Philippines, who paraded his men one morning with their backs against a high stone wall. "Now, then," said he, "any son-of-a-gun who doesn't want to remain behind for another six months, take two paces to the rear."

And there is this to be urged in favour of those who elected to return to their homes in New South Wales, that they had put in their six months' training at considerable expense to themselves, and stood to lose a good deal more if they remained at the Cape. Most of them were in situations more or less lucrative, and they had only provided for nine months' leave of absence.

But public feeling in the colony was then at such fever heat that life at home was made unbearable for them. They were ridiculed in the public streets, and each morning's mail brought them consignments of white feathers from erstwhile friends. Trooper Harkus, prize-winner at Islington on two occasions, was among the crowd thus persecuted.

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gave up his business, left his wife and family, and went back to the Cape. He died of enteric at Bloemfontein.

But before all this came to light the Colonial Government was pressed to include some Lancers in its proposals, in order to bring the strength of the Aldershot detachment up to the uniform standard of 125. The battery of Artillery was offered to the British Government, and declined for the present. A half unit of the Medical Corps was accepted with thanks; also additional Lancers. Then there arose a cry from the other cavalry regiment, known as the Australian Horse. Although quite recently raised, it had proved itself too useful a corps to be overlooked altogether. Finally, it was decided by way of compromise—rather unwisely—to mix up cavalry and Mounted Rifles in one unit in the proportion of about fifty to eighty. The infantry unit was drawn from the ranks of four partially-paid regiments and four volunteer corps. Every man was either a first-class shot or a marksman. The Mounted Rifles were this and more; they were first-class riders of the best Australian type. Major-General Hutton raised and nursed them into efficiency during his term of office as Military Commandant in New South Wales.

Having thus just about doubled the scope of the Government's original proposals, it

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became necessary to engage steamer accommodation accordingly; and so it happened that, while other colonies landed complete detachments, New South Wales dumped her troops down in Table Bay rather promiscuously.

The first to arrive were the Lancers from Aldershot. They were sent straight up to Orange River to join Lord Methuen's column. Then came the Medical Corps and some more Lancers. This lot was left in camp at Green Point for some weeks. The *Aberdeen* landed the Mounted Rifles and the infantry a week or two later, and finally, after another long spell, the *Langton Grange* put into port with a consignment of remounts and the Australian Horse, who formed part of the Mounted Rifle unit.

In this casual fashion were we dropped at the base of operations to the infinite dismay and confusion of every Staff officer with whom we came into contact. They couldn't, and haven't, even up to this day, quite got the hang of us.

"Dear me," drawled a slender, scarlet-tabbed, monocled youth at Cape Town, "I thought that last lot which landed by the *Medic* the other day were Australians. You don't mean to say you're from Australia too?"

"The *Medic* landed men from Victori

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South Australia and Western Australia. We are from New South Wales."

"Upon my word, this is very irregular, don't you know. Are there any more on the way?"

"Lots. Three or four boat-loads yet."

On Sunday night, December 3rd, 1899, in pitch darkness we crawled into Port Elizabeth. We left Sydney on November 3rd, and had put in a large portion of the voyage wondering whether the war would be over by the time we struck the African Coast. We were completely equipped—horses, saddles, rifles, ammunition and everything on board; our spurs, stirrup-irons, sword-scabbards—everything usually bright—had been carefully coated over with black paint, our Maxim gun and wagons khaki'd and kits overhauled. We were feverishly anxious to know what was to be done with us, and had a sort of idea that somebody would be waiting impatiently for us on the wharf.

Next morning we were ordered round to Cape Town. The Disembarkation Officer came aboard, gave some hurried instructions, and left us for forty-eight hours, then suddenly reappeared and hurried the infantry into the train—destination unknown to us. There were no intermediate stages with us in those days. Once aboard the railway carriages we thought we were off to the magic "front."

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This detachment, however, was pulled up at Orange River Station, and then travelled by easy stages as far as Enslin, where it stuck fast for eight or ten weeks.

The Mounted Rifles were left behind at the base waiting arrival of another steamer. Five weeks later this unit, having been completed, was also sent up the line, but at De Aar something went wrong and the men were once more split up into fragments, one lot remaining in camp, and the rest going round to Naauwpoort and Arundel. In the meantime our Lancer unit from Aldershot, which arrived earlier in the campaign, had also been split up, one fraction of twenty-eight, acting as Mounted Infantry, having gone through three big battles with Methuen. The rest were round Naauwpoort way. Finally the Medical Corps was sent up to Orange River, and there it remained until February.

In this wise were we distributed. In this wise was our identity lost sight of, as well apparently as our whereabouts.

Certainly someone did, about this time, make an attempt to form what was called an "Australian Regiment" at Enslin. It was placed under the command of Colonel Hoad, a Special Service Officer from Victoria, and did some excellent work on the lines of communication, but it was not a representative corps. It included one unit of N.S.W. I

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fantry, two of Victorian Mounted Infantry, one or two from South Australia, one from Western Australia, and one from Tasmania. The Queenslanders were further down the line, at Belmont, the New Zealanders at Arundel, and the rest of New South Wales—anywhere.

Australians, generally, appeared to be regarded as a somewhat risky experiment, although twenty-eight of the N.S.W. Lancers had fought with Lord Methuen through the storm and stress of Graspan, Belmont, Modder River and Magersfontein, and acquitted themselves to the undisguised satisfaction of their Commanding Officer. But there were only twenty-eight of them and their identity was overshadowed by the larger unit to which they were attached. Rimington's Scouts, the only South African colonials then at the front, were in an even worse plight. They were frankly distrusted—the question of their loyalty was freely discussed, and, as I thought at the time, most unfairly. They, like us, were *volunteers*, and, as such, not yet to be trusted. On the last day of the old year, however, the Queenslanders and Canadians got their first chance. Under Colonel Pilcher, with Major Bayly, N.S.W. General Staff, second in command, they went out from Belmont, fought a brilliant little engagement at Sunnyside, which relieved the little

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town of Douglas and resulted in the capture of about forty rebels. Two Queenslanders were killed on this occasion and several others wounded, but they fought so pluckily, and yet so unconventionally, that general attention was drawn to their methods, and Colonial stock went up fifty per cent. in the military market. They taught the Army the "helmet trick," which has suggested the design for the cover of this book.

CHAPTER II

MY FIRST FIGHT

As I left Australia for Cape Town, my press friends gave me, among other things, some good advice.

“Now, what we want at this end are good descriptive accounts of the big fights—not the tommy-rot that most correspondents send to their papers. Don’t rely too much on Staff officers. They will give you dry details, which we don’t want. See these things for yourself, and, of course, get your stuff on the wires as quickly as possible.”

At that distance, and knowing nothing of the conditions of modern battles, it seemed to be the easiest thing in the world. You had merely to take up a commanding position—vaguely indicated by a broad sweep of the right arm—provide yourself with a good pair of field-glasses and keep a sharp lookout. Nothing simpler. Curious that these old campaigners didn’t appear to have hit upon such an obvious expedient. It must

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be just like a sham fight at Easter, only more so.

Everything seemed to play into my hands. Three big battles had just been fought on the Modder River side, and a fourth was brewing between there and Kimberley. Just in time! Within twelve hours of landing at South Arm, Cape Town, I was on the train bound north. A block occurred at Orange River, but I got through, travelling to the rail-head on a "ration-train."

The night was pitch dark and stormy. The guard's van was also pitch dark and stuffy—chock full of meat and evil-odoured bread. An open truck seemed more wholesome, until a tropical rainstorm convinced me that there were worse places in this drenched world than the inside of a guard's van. Others had come to this conclusion before me.

I found an artillery officer sleeping soundly on a batch of bread, and nearly put my foot in his mouth as I felt my way to a sack of sugar in the corner. Stepping over the prostrate form of a Guardsman my foot slipped, and I fell prone on to a side of raw beef. It struck me at the time that people might be a little more careful of the way in which they withdrew their hands when a person was walking about in the dark, but I didn't say anything. The other chap did.

My First Fight

Someone came in with a lantern.

"Look here, sir, it's no use your collaring that beef for a pillow, because I have to put it out at Witteputt's. Come over here and then I sha'n't have to disturb you so often."

Reluctantly I rose once more and felt my way across to some long packages lying close to the wall of the van. Two seconds later my seat rolled from beneath me.

"Holy Moses! Can't you find anything to sit on but my ribs? I suppose you can't sleep yourself, so you won't let anyone else."

I said I was sorry, but that they couldn't expect to sleep if they insisted on striking up a conversation with every stranger who entered the car; also, that I myself had not uttered a single word until that second. (No reply.)

The rain continued to fall and beat upon that van, and it leaked—like a second-hand shower-bath.

I sat in a pool of water and a cramped position until we reached Witteputt's, where we put out the raw beef. I stepped into the breach—and the blood. At Belmont we got rid of a coffin; at Honeynest Kloof we dropped biscuits and sugar and wet matches and bully-beef. By the time we reached Klokfontein we could venture to turn over without fear of knocking somebody else's front teeth down his throat, but no one had a pillow left.

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The rations had all been distributed—dumped down here and there all along the line.

Weird, long-coated, sodden figures from nowhere in particular slushed through the inky, soppy blackness as we approached—if they happened to hear the engine's whistle above the pelt of the rain. When they didn't we dropped the "grub" alongside the track, trusting to luck that it wouldn't be washed away before morning, or, at anyrate, before someone rescued it.

We passed the down train at Enslin. The driver was big with important news. Leaning over the side of his cab, one hand on the throttle and the other full of cotton waste, he described to the up-guard how that our guns had been pumping lyddite into the Boer trenches all that day, "and the very first shot carried away the top of a big kopje." The fight was to be resumed at daybreak. Where? Oh, about half-way between Modder and Kimberley. He didn't know the name of the place, but from Modder River Station they could see the shells bursting quite easily.

There was no more sleep in the van that night.

About twelve, as we approached the river bed, the engine whistled twice and pulled itself up.

"Keep your heads in down this cutting or you'll get them taken off," roared the guard,

My First Fight

and we slid down between towering, dripping mud walls, which appeared to shave the sides of the trucks.

The drip, drip, drip, drip changed to a steady roar. We were crossing a low stone causeway almost flush with the surging water. Above and against a shifting background of angry cloud towered vaguely a stretch of fantastically-twisted trellis-work, dipping grotesquely at either end like a broken-down switchback. This was the old bridge as the Boers left it.

Another stretch of weeping mud walls and we gained the high level once more. Modder River Station was within half a mile, but there was no room for a mere ration train at the platform, so they left us where we were until morning. If I had been a little older and harder in the mouth I should probably have waited there also and had a few hours' sleep and a decent breakfast at the "Crown and Royal Hotel" before setting out on the warpath.

But this was going to be my first fight and I must really be out in time to get a front seat, as it were. Besides, I didn't feel the slightest inclination to sleep, or even to eat. Yes, I would just walk along to the engine and get enough hot water to make a cup of cocoa, have a mouthful of biscuit and some chocolate, leave my goods and chattels in the van in

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charge of the guard, and walk gently out.

This brilliant idea struck me about three o'clock of this Monday morning, December eleventh, in the year of our Lord Eighteen hundred and ninety-nine. Young and foolish war correspondents often rush in where angels —etc., etc. I hadn't the countersign or the faintest notion of the lay of the country, but some person or other whom I asked told me to keep bearing half-right, so I bore half-right as well as I could in the pitch darkness, and kept bearing half-right for what seemed to be ten or twelve miles without encountering a human being. But just as I began to think I must have missed the whole show I stumbled on it. A convoy, two miles long, had halted just ahead of me.

"Where are you bound for?" I asked.

"Dunno," replied a sergeant-major. "Suppose we're making for Kimberley, but we have orders to wait here until we find whether the Boers have cleared out from their trenches."

"Will there be any fight?"

"I don't think so meself. They all seem to say that the lyddite frightened 'em away yesterday."

"Where are our troops?"

"Dunno. I think they are more to the left than this."

So I bore half-left on the off-chance. The

My First Fight

rain by this time had cleared away and things were just beginning to define themselves against the first streaks of coming dawn. I sat down on an ant-heap and looked round. This was not the commanding position that I had thought to take up, but one must feel one's way gradually. Jee-ru-sa-lem !!! What's this? A rifle shot! An absurd notion flashed through my mind that somebody must have caught sight of me and loosed off his gun. I felt somewhat hurt for the moment, but it didn't seem an opportune time to argue the matter, more especially as, just at this second, half a dozen Mausers hiccuped fitfully in the offing, and half a dozen attenuated "phuts" flicked the atmosphere above. The lee side of an ant-hill by this time commanded quite as good a view of the proceedings as I cared for. It was not over dignified—in fact, it seemed absurd, but I couldn't write that graphic description of the fight that they wanted in Australia if I allowed myself to be popped off by the first Boer bullet that came my way. Half a second later I would cheerfully have forfeited a month's pay for an open grave to drop into, or a dry ditch—anything slightly less "commanding" than the open veldt.

From a hiccup the fire suddenly developed into the mighty roaring cough of some million-throated monster. The air sang and danced

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with swishing lead. The noise grew to a deafening roar as of ten thousand railway trucks banging into one another.

Oh ! If only it were possible to make out what it was all about ! Nothing in sight—no galloping horses—no smoke—no guns—no nothing. One might as well be in his own backyard, listening to the neighbours letting off crackers. Where was everybody ? It was broad daylight by this time, and there had been enough noise to wake the dead. Well, it's no use lying here all day. I'll just creep up to the top of the next rise. There ought to be a fine view from there.

I gained the next rise and found a friendly rock. I also found that I could just see as far as the crest of the next ridge, a quarter of a mile away. This is a feature of the South African veldt. But I must have been getting closer to the fighting zone, for moving figures in khaki began to cross and recross my front —kilted Highlanders running for all they were worth—running and dropping down promiscuously, as from sheer exhaustion. Some regained their feet and started off again full pelt ; others lay longer. Poor fellows, they must be thoroughly pumped.

I went over to the one lying nearest me and asked him where everybody was going in such a hurry. He turned a pair of glazed eyes on me and opened his mouth as though

My First Fight

to speak, but blood instead of sound issued therefrom. "P-i-n-g, p-i-n-g," sang a couple of bullets overhead. He motioned me wildly to go away.

I crawled on hands and knees to the next man and offered my water-bottle. He was quite dead. Another, racing wildly, fell prone in the soft sand alongside, his eyeballs almost starting from his head.

"For the love of God give me a drop of whisky," he gasped. I administered the dose and put a question.

"Damn the fight," he groaned. "I've seen enough to last me for the rest of my life."

"But where are you all going?"

"Where have we been, you mean. They marched us into the mouth of hell, and we had to come back the best way we could. Thanks, I don't mind if I do; just a small drop. I'm shaking like a leaf from head to foot. Retiring? I should think we are—I wouldn't advise you to stay here too long."

I moved over to the left. Stretcher-bearers were moving hither and thither carrying heavy burdens to the rear. A knot of bareheaded Highlanders gathered round a long hole in the ground, and something was gently lowered into it, while a rich but rather shaky voice uttered a few words of prayer. Other holes were being dug round about.

Over them soared a huge captive balloon

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with a man and a telescope in the basket. Ambulance wagons drove up; doctors took off their coats and turned up their shirt-sleeves. They stretched blankets over the butts of rifles, stuck bayonets down, in the ground, to protect the wounded from the heat of the now blazing sun until their turn came to be attended to. The veldt was turned into a shambles.

I spoke to some of the less seriously wounded. Yes, the Highland Brigade had been horribly cut up. Dead and dying were still lying in hundreds close under the Boer trenches and they would have to lie there until dark. The doctors were doing all they could, but it was impossible to do much under such a heavy fire.

About eleven o'clock I began to feel an unpleasant sort of suspicion that I hadn't seen very much of this fight after all. I was hungry and tired and very hot. Everything seemed to be such a tremendous distance away. The big guns I took to be about three miles off, judging by sound. The smaller pieces of artillery about the same distance in the opposite direction. Cavalry and infantry dotted about here and there in between.

I asked where the General was. Oh, he would be about two miles away to the left. I should soon find him because he was riding in the front of a wagon and had two Lancer

My First Fight

orderlies behind him, or rather he would have if he hadn't sent them on messages.

I walked about a mile and a half in the direction indicated and inquired again, this time from three hulking chaps who were crouching down behind some low brush.

"Blest if I know," said the biggest.

"How's the fight going?"

"Blest if I can make out. They say we've surrounded the Boers and they'll have to give in."

An officer came up yelling, "Come out of that at once and get into your proper places, you miserable cowards! Get out, quick, or I'll come and kick you out."

He was a mere boy—not more than half the size of the smallest—but they didn't wait to be told twice. He followed, calling them all the variegated curs he could think of at the moment, then rushed off to another clump of bushes, shook his fist at it and two men crawled reluctantly from beneath.

British regulars funkings it! By Jove, they must have had an awful shaking up. I could hardly believe my own eyesight. I followed that officer, watched him round up quite a dozen men and literally push them into the firing line.

By this time the storm of bullets had somewhat subsided, but occasional drops were still patterning down on the rocks just ahead.

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"Lie down, you almighty idiot!" cried an infuriated individual from the depths of some long grass close by. "Can't you see you are drawing the fire?"

I lay down and buried my face in the ground. The storm began to break out afresh. I hadn't the faintest notion how it had happened, but that was a detail. I began to count the intervals between shots and wonder whether they would ever get the range of my little shelter, and then I believe I dropped off to sleep.

When I regained consciousness the place was alive with khaki figures all digging little breastworks for themselves with their bayonets. The sun was beating down with terrific force on the back of my neck, my water-bottle was quite empty, and altogether I began to arrive at the conclusion that this game of war corresponding was not all that my imagination had pictured it. As for seeing the fight, I could have watched it almost as well from the top of a 'bus in Piccadilly.

Thoroughly discouraged and exhausted I started to walk back to the hotel. I found the whole army retiring in the same direction.

"Have we been defeated?" I asked of a gunner who was walking alongside a fifteen-pounder.

"Blest if I know," he replied. "They seem to think in the battery that Methuen

My First Fight

has got right round them on the north, and is just withdrawing the troops on this side to induce the Boers to come out into the open." The same old story ; we were always surrounding them, but always stopping short at cornering them. I found this out afterwards, as I did a good many other things in connection with this particular fight.

For my description I had to rely on something besides personal observation.

CHAPTER III

SOMETHING TO DO

IN those early days, while Methuen was "resting" at Modder after the Magersfontein fight, and when things seemed only very middling with the British Army; while the bulk of the Colonial troops were left to sizzle on the gridiron of prolonged and masterly inactivity at various points down the Cape Town-Kimberley railway line (most of them at Enslin, a mere siding on the open veldt boasting one ganger's hut, a solitary tree, and a well of muddy water), the Australian Regiment was comfortably housed under canvas—tents mathematically dressed, lines as clean as a man-o'-war's poop deck, and horses groomed as though they were in barrack stables. The Gordons, who were camped alongside, had even got a mess-tent up, and were talking about sending for their regimental plate. The Colonials were too new to the game, and too keen about showing what they could do, to take things philosophically. Mess tents

Something to Do

and regimental plate! Great Scott! These were luxuries to be indulged in at Easter camps of instruction. They were not playing at war now.

So they fell to digging trenches in the daytime and sleeping in them at night. They let their beards grow, and wrote home to their friends telling them what a rough time they were having. They carved foot-paths up the kopjes so that they could reach the picket posts the more easily, and built substantial redoubts in case of surprise.

Some weeks before, when the air was thick with rumours of an impending fight to the north of the Modder River, the N.S.W. Infantry had been stopped at Orange River Station on their way up to the front. The officer in charge presented himself at the Commandant's office and offered to march his men up to Modder rather than miss the chance of taking part in the engagement. You see even he was quite new to the game. Perhaps he didn't know that Methuen was not actually depending upon the arrival of the N.S.W. Infantry to make sure of a victory. An immaculate Staff officer with an eye-glass, whose principal object in life seemed to consist in keeping other people on the lines of communication since he had to remain there himself, put the case bluntly :—

“The British Army hasn't any use for foot-

Australia at the Front

sore infantry at the front, and in any case we are not waiting for your men before we make an advance. You will go up when we are ready to send you."

And so they straggled up to Enslin, still hopeful and eager. But things grew deadly slow. The arrival of the ration train became the event of the day, and even this generally happened in the middle of the night. When everything else failed — when a night alarm ceased to arouse the faintest tremor — they fell to discussing the errors and tactical mistakes of British generals in the field, and gambled their back pay on the chances of finishing the campaign in fifteen years. They watched the battle of Magersfontein sitting on the tops of their kopjes — saw the huge lyddite shells bursting over the Boer position, and cursed their hard luck at being so near and yet so far. Then they returned to their tents to write long, descriptive accounts of the fight to their friends, pointing out the weak places in the attack, the deadly destructiveness of lyddite, and the probability of they themselves being cut off and butchered in cold blood if Methuen didn't hurry up and relieve them from this fearful tension.

But with time even the desire to move weakened — hope too long deferred, and that sort of thing. On New Year's Eve the Officer Commanding was dining in state with the Gordons

Something to Do

in their new mess tent. Some of his officers felt that something was due to the occasion. Bell-tents were too small and stuffy. The atmosphere outside was too muggy for a camp fire even if there had been enough firewood. And yet they wanted to invite their brother officers from the other colonies to take a glass of wine with them. Company messing does not make for conviviality, so they brought out half a dozen candles and arranged them in a little circle out on the veldt. The Victorians produced some whisky, somebody else some empty cases to sit on, and so on. Each brought his own pannikin.

Late in the evening the Colonel returned. The Gordons had drunk the health of the Australians, and he was very proud of it. He felt that the compliment ought to be returned, so he had decided, in view of the fact that they seemed to have taken root here, to send for a mess-tent straight away. (Loud cheers.)

How were the mighty falling !

At this moment Captain Probyn, medical officer to the Gordons, dropped round to say that a small patrol in charge of a junior officer had been surprised a few miles off, and some men had been sent out to bring in the wounded.

The Officer Commanding said he would send out a strong mounted party next morning to see if he could locate these Boers.

Australia at the Front

"Send me, sir." "Can I go, sir?" greeted this announcement from all sides.

"I'll see in the morning. In the meantime, we had better all turn in ready for whatever happens."

And so the party broke up, each officer retiring to dream, not of mess tents, but the chance of something to do at last.

They never got the mess tent.

That very evening the Queenslanders and Canadians were sent out from Belmont to the relief of Douglas, and about a week later the Victorian Mounted Infantry got their first chance.

In co-operation with troops from Modder River and Belmont they invaded the Free State in the direction of Jacobsdal, surprised a couple of Boer patrols, and captured a big lot of rifles and ammunition. Both these little shows were carried out under the stage management of Colonel Pilcher, and they both succeeded—largely, I fancy, owing to the care he took to prevent his plans being given away to the Boers beforehand. To this end he arranged a cordon of sentries all round the camp, and kept everybody inside until he was safely through with his surprises. He acted on the principle that everyone was a spy until proved otherwise—even correspondents.

Some of us by this time had become fairly

Something to Do

well accustomed to being looked upon as something half way between a disease germ and a door-scraper, and Staff officers were just about the last people in the world to whom we looked for tips of impending "moves." But we heard in a casual sort of way of some "cavalry reconnaissance" from Modder River, and each resolved on his own account to see what it was all about.

I remember a rather curious situation in this connection. Some of the London correspondents had been asking each other to dinner that night. They had some music, drank each other's health, and satisfied themselves that they were all "jolly good fellows." But about ten o'clock a couple of them began to show signs of uneasiness. Each wanted to get away without arousing suspicion—the cavalry were leaving that night at half after ten.

Number One finally took the initiative. He had rather an important appointment and hoped they would excuse him. Number Two was after him within ten minutes.

Later the same evening they met again—but in the guard-room.

"Hullo," said Number One, "you here! I thought you were still enjoying yourself over at the island."

"Pooh!" returned the other, "you mean you hoped I was. But I can see as far through a ladder as most people."

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They had both sat too long at dinner to bother about getting the countersign, and the pickets had refused to let them through.

But some of us managed to be there when Pilcher made his move. He managed the thing beautifully right up to the delivery of the grand *coup*. Two Boer patrols who were in the habit of meeting at Lubbe's house were surprised in the very act of getting their breakfast and fled hungry away, leaving their rifles stacked in the yard, and an ox wagon, laden with ammunition, outspanned. Reserves of cartridges were found on the flat roof of the house. But breakfast was waiting, so we went inside and helped ourselves.

The retirement, however, was not carried out with the same regard for detail. Something went very near happening on two or three occasions. You see there were three separate parties out and moving on the same spot. The Belmont and Enslin detachments, moreover, consisted almost exclusively of Australians, who were simply dying to get a shot at somebody. It was not surprising therefore that the Queenslanders from Belmont, having taken the ox wagon in tow, should have been pounced down upon by the Victorians from Enslin. They went within an ace of firing into one another.

At the time we put it down to the fact that

Something to Do

both were wearing the Australian felt hat, and we spoke feelingly on the subject, because only a week before, near Douglas, two Australian correspondents, in soft felt hats, had been stalked and nearly sniped by our own men—the Queenslanders; and I can assure you these chaps have a business-like way of coming at you, which is horribly disconcerting. They keep you covered with their rifles all the time. You whistle over the air to “*Soldiers of the Queen*” just to convince your inner self that you are not a particle nervous. But those dancing muzzles irritate. You begin to recall the creepy feeling which used to steal over you as a youngster when you discovered the eyes in your grandfather’s portrait following you all round a big, lonely room.

“I hope they’ll make sure who we are before they shoot us.”

“Thank your stars they are Australians and not British Tommies; otherwise they would shoot first and make inquiries afterwards.”

It was a weak and rather unkind remark, made more in jest than anger, but it was repeated later in the campaign with exceeding bitterness. A Suffolk sentry shot at a correspondent’s Cape cart one day on the journey from Naauwpoort to Rensburg, at a range of half a mile, and then came strolling down to inquire why he hadn’t answered the challenge—at that distance!

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But to return to the felt hats. The Queenslanders didn't shoot. They crept inside hailing range.

"Who are you?"

"We're Australian."

"Then why the deuce don't you wear helmets?"

It was rather cool considering that they themselves wore the felt type of head-gear, plus a tuft of emu feather, which, by the way, is invisible at 100 yards.

Similarly it never seemed to strike the Victorians when they came upon the Queenslanders that they were all tyled pretty well on the same pattern.

But they had time for reflection. Before making their own camps again, the cavalry which had started from Modder River dropped on to their rear guard and made a determined effort to cut off that ox wagon which was rather dragging behind. The Lancers had some excuse. They were duly and correctly helmeted, and they hadn't seen much of the Australian felt hat. We had a sort of uneasy suspicion that something was wrong, because they seemed to move with more order and method than Boers, but we couldn't distinguish their helmets from their haversacks, and their "sticks" or lances were as invisible as the dust on their boots. We hadn't much time to think because they appeared to mean

Something to Do

business. So the column was disposed in battle array and the guns had already been unlimbered. They were wheeled into action and primed.

“Number One—At 4000 yards—F—. Good God! Cease fire—I mean don’t fire at all. They’re our own men. Limber up, quick!”

It was a close shave.

Head-gear, apparently, doesn’t amount to much.

CHAPTER IV

“ SUNNYSIDE ”

THE Sunnyside affair, as I have hinted, came as a complete surprise to the rebels, mainly because the preparations were kept so secret. Observe how it was managed. During the third week in December, Colonel Pilcher paid a preliminary visit to Belmont prior to taking over command of the garrison from Colonel Otter, Royal Canadian Regiment. He spent the whole of one day in carefully examining the defences *on the eastern* or Free State side of the camp, and made several alterations in disposition. He then returned to Orange River and didn't actually assume command until the 28th, when he immediately set himself to organise the necessary commissariat and transport for a sortie, presumably into the Free State. The system of transport introduced by Lord Kitchener was not then in existence, consequently the garrison was well supplied with mules and wagons. From the outset Pilcher had determined to increase

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the mobility of his force by using these wagons for the transport of infantry : from fifteen to twenty men per wagon were looked upon as a fair load, according to whether or not stores were carried. This system had been tried during the Boer war of 1881, in the sorties from Pretoria under Colonel Bellairs, when it certainly proved to be a marked success, although not quite to the extent anticipated, owing to the heavy state of the roads and the consequent fact that the men were obliged to walk a large part of the distance.

On December 29th a flying column of about 500, all ranks, paraded with stores and transport at Belmont at three o'clock in the afternoon and marched *eastwards* towards the Free State Border, six miles distant, preceded by the Queensland Mounted Infantry as a screen. The force, however, was withdrawn late in the afternoon, for the ostensible reason that the transport arrangements had been completed too late that day to permit of a long march. To add colour to this announcement, native spies had been dispatched with specific instructions as to the information required in connection with the enemy's movements on the Free State side, and rumours of possible Boer advances were ingeniously invented and put into circulation. There can be no doubt that Pilcher's intention of preventing any conception of his projected

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move to Sunnyside and Douglas was fully realised.

In the meantime a secret scheme of co-operation had been arranged, by which the Orange River Garrison would send a detached mounted force westward along the south bank of the river as far as Mark's Drift, while Lord Methuen would dispatch a similar mounted force from Modder River westward to Koodoosberg Drift. Profound secrecy was also observed in regard to these flank movements.

At mid-day, on December 30th, the following force paraded, again on the *eastern* side of Belmont: one section, two guns, "P" Battery, Royal Horse Artillery, under Major De Rouge-mont; 250 Queensland Mounted Infantry under Colonel Ricardo, with two galloping Maxims under Lieutenant Pelham (A.D.C. to the Governor of Queensland); forty Mounted Infantry (Royal Munster Fusiliers) under Lieutenants Ryan and Tyrell; 100 Royal Canadian Regiment—infantry—under Captain Barker, with two Maxims on mule carriages under Captain Bell; one section, including two ambulance wagons of the N.S.W. Army Medical Corps, under Captain Roth; and a section of Royal Engineer Field Telegraphists under Lieutenant Henrici. Lieutenant-Colonel Bayly (N.S.W. General Staff) acted as the Staff Officer to Colonel Pilcher. Three hundred rounds of ammuni-

“Sunnyside”

tion per rifle were carried in addition to the 100 in the bandoliers.

Not until the march actually commenced was anything in the shape of a western movement indicated ; then, suddenly, the whole force crossed the railway line between Orange and Modder Rivers, and moved across the open country to the kopjes on Richmond Farm. After proceeding about two miles, Pilcher halted the column and addressed all ranks. Then, and only then, was the intention of the movement understood. Including this short halt, the day's march of twenty-two miles was completed by seven o'clock that night at Thornhill Farm.

For local intelligence Pilcher depended chiefly upon the brothers Cohen and Dugmore, sons of residents in that district. The elder, Cohen, had acted as guide to Methuen at the Magersfontein battle. Secrecy of movement being all-important, Pilcher also took the wise precaution of detaining all natives found not only on the road but on both flanks. They were imprisoned at their kraals and left in charge of small guards *en route*.

Shortly before daybreak next morning the column started from Thornhill, moving northwards in the direction of the Sunnyside kopjes. Our movements were effectively concealed from the enemy, through the expert guiding of the young Colonials just referred to. The

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force was split up into several portions, which moved along approximately parallel routes, until a junction of several units was effected at Verneukberg, and here a reconnaissance was made from the summit of the highest kopje towards Sunnyside. The sun had now risen and it soon became evident that the troops were in for a hot day's work; but again they struck a patch of luck in the shape of a few showers of rain which laid the tell-tale clouds of dust. Added to this was the fortunate circumstance that the attack was to be delivered on the first day of the year—a universal Boer holiday—when the vigilance of outposts would probably be relaxed, and many of the enemy remain at home to engage in the festivities as well as the religious observations of their "nachtmaal."

Debouching from the friendly cover of Verneukberg, the column swept round to the western side of the chain of kopjes which run north towards Sunnyside. Moving over heavy sandy ground, still concealed by the scrub which skirted the lower ridges, a point was reached about seven miles from Thornhill, where the heights of Sunnyside came plainly into view, and from here Pilcher made his final dispositions.

Two reconnoitring patrols were detached from the Queensland Mounted Infantry to move round the east and west sides of the

“Sunnyside”

Sunnyside hills, with the idea of ascertaining exactly the position of the Boer laager. Unfortunately the western patrol, under Lieutenant Adie, after working round to the north-west corner of the broken ground above the laager, found itself too close to be comfortable, or even safe. The party was suddenly confronted by two Boers, about thirty yards from the rocky cover afforded by the neighbouring kopje. Adie dismounted and called upon the pair to surrender, but just at this moment he and his men were fired upon by another lot of Boers, who were concealed among the rocks. The first volley killed one out of the party of four—Private M'Leod. Two out of the remaining three troopers, and Lieutenant Adie, were dangerously wounded. Private Jones's body was found next day among the rocks, among which he had crawled to die. Adie had received five wounds, including one shot through the stomach and another in the head. He was with difficulty got on to his horse, but, once in the saddle, galloped out of range; he was too weak from loss of blood to get back to the column with the news. Only Private Butler got back out of those five.

The eastern patrol, moving round a very large circumference, were also long delayed, so that the general advance commenced before information was received from either flank.

“P” Battery R.H.A., the R.M.F. Mounted

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Infantry and the Canadians were sent round to the right, or eastern, flank, with orders to avoid observation if possible until they had taken up a position suitable for artillery north and east of the presumed position of the Boer laager. Shortly afterwards the Queenslanders, widely extended right across the high ground from east to west, began to move over a series of ridges northwards, directly above the Sunnyside kopjes. Wagons were laagered, details left in charge, and the ambulances ordered to follow the troops. The eastern column, under Major De Rougemont, succeeded in getting into action at 1800 yards' range, and opened fire right into the Boer laager, dropping the first shell among the tents and wounding several men. The Mounted Fusiliers, in the meantime, pushed further round, north and west, among the low scrub which surrounded the kopjes. Here they came upon concealed parties of the enemy, whom they gallantly engaged the whole day, taking every advantage of cover to push forward. As was subsequently proved, they did considerable damage to the other side.

The Canadians moved slowly in the direction of the Boer camp, between the guns and the main advance of the Queenslanders. Eventually, as the latter gained way over the undulating ground, moving up in successive widely-extended waves, the Boer camp was

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sighted at the north-east corner of a sort of horseshoe-shaped re-entrant. One company of Queenslanders was sent to the left, and, working round on the western slope of the high ground, soon became hotly engaged. The main portion of the enemy made for the heights immediately our artillery opened fire. A second detachment of Queensland Mounted Infantry was pushed forward on the higher slope of the ridge and became similarly engaged; a third was ordered off in support.

Taking advantage of all available cover, and working among the rocks with surprising intuition, they pushed forward at every point. The enemy was driven pell-mell from cover to cover, only to find themselves at each point confronted by unexpected parties of these enterprising Colonials.

The Canadians moved forward from the right down into the open, advancing with remarkable steadiness, eventually coming under a most irritating fire from the stubbornly-resisting Boers, now driven across from west to east by the first advance of the Queenslanders. The Canadians, however, held gamely to their advantage, and did great execution across the open end of the horseshoe hollow and above the Boer camp.

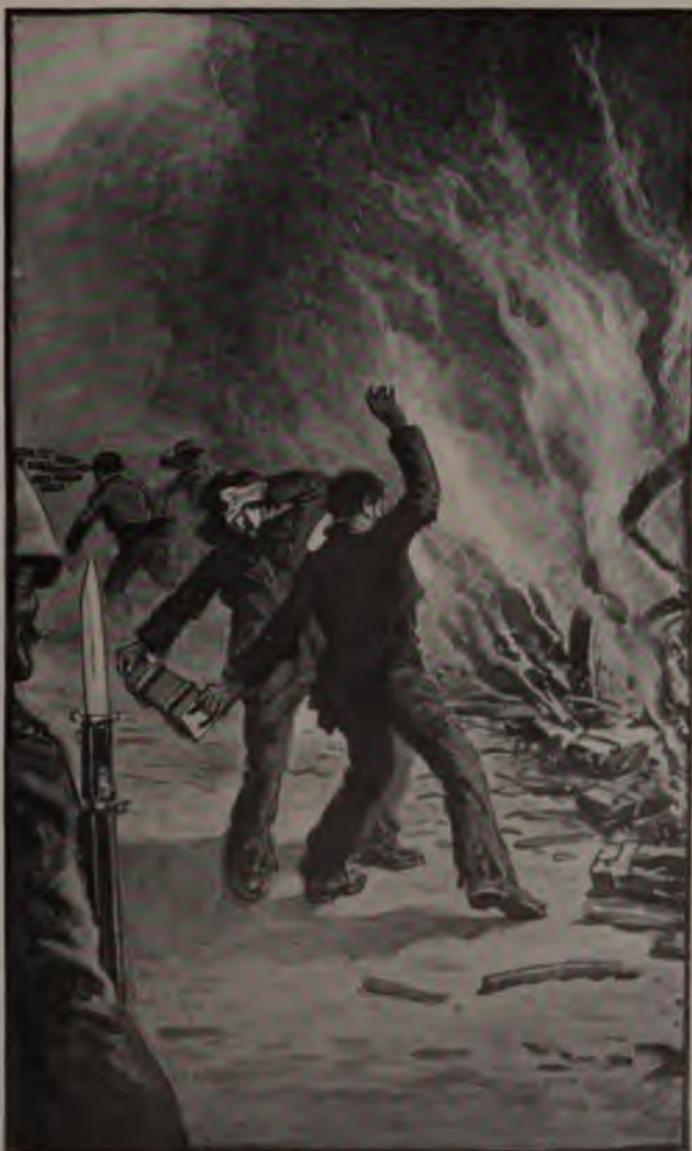
Finally Pilcher despatched his reserve of Queensland Mounted Infantry, which debouched from the southernmost spur of the

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re-entrant, and, moving diagonally across the low ground, gallantly climbed the heights on the farther side, and came up just in time to assist in the total surrender of the remains of the Boer commando. Forty prisoners were taken at this juncture, most of whom were found to be rebels, with a few Dutch farmers and a small sprinkling of Transvaalers. Losses on the Boer side were said to be about twelve, but it was subsequently ascertained that their casualties were considerably more. Burying - parties were busy for many days afterwards, and there can be little doubt that, including wounded, fifty would be nearer the mark. Captains Dowse, Reid, Pinnock and Bailey, of the Queensland Mounted Infantry, specially distinguished themselves as leaders that day.

The action was over about four o'clock in the afternoon, and Colonel Pilcher immediately pushed on to Dover Farm, about seven miles distant. The Canadians in charge of the prisoners, and the N.S.W. Medical Corps, to look after the wounded, were left behind. Pilcher entered Douglas in state, but almost immediately retired upon Belmont with prisoners and convoy.

Prior to this somewhat hurried withdrawal, the prisoners were put to a task which they little relished. There was no time to bury all the captured ammunition; we had no im-



Drawn by Norman H. Hardy

Sketch by Frank Wilkinson

BETWEEN TWO FIRES



“Sunnyside”

mediate use for it, and there happened to be a huge fire handy. What more rational than that the rebels should be made to destroy their surplus cartridges in the flames. The order was issued, and the guards were instructed to see that no time was lost in the process. Two by two, carrying boxes of ammunition between them, the now frightened Boers were marched up to the blaze. Two Boer wagons had been run together and set fire to, old bedding and broken rifles had been pitched in indiscriminately, and the whole lump burnt merrily. Into the centre lobbed the first batch of cartridges, which immediately commenced to spit and sputter like a thousand Chinese crackers. The second pair of rebels hung back sheepishly, not at all inclined to face the music, until they were prodded on by the surrounding sentries. Then, with arms raised to shield their faces, they approached gingerly. One—two—three, and in went another box, with another *feu-de-joie* like to the last. Thus it went on until the whole pile had been destroyed. The men didn't wait to watch the effect. They threw the boxes in and bolted for their lives.

CHAPTER V

MOUNTED TROOPS AND TROOPS MOUNTED

“DRAWING fire” may be a necessary and exciting feature of campaigning, but as a daily performance it is calculated to become monotonous.

“Mr Osborne, will you send half a dozen of your men over there and draw the enemy’s fire?”

The Sydney Lancers had heard this order issued so frequently that they began to look upon it as a sort of fixture in each day’s programme. They had some wonderfully narrow escapes, as far as their own skins were concerned. And they lost many of their horses. Then came a spell of enforced idleness, and on Christmas Day this little band of twenty-eight Colonials was suddenly ordered from Modder River round to Rensburg, where they were to join General French’s command and the rest of their comrades. Even at this early stage of the campaign they had worn themselves threadbare with crawling up and down kopjes, and sleeping on the open veldt,

Mounted Troops

"mit everytings on." Sydney people would never have recognised in them the smart, dashing Household Cavalrymen who were accustomed to make such a brave show when they escorted a governor to the opening of Parliament in Macquarie Street. They had discarded the picturesque slouch hat with its nodding plumes of cock's feather, because their own comrades had shot at them several times in mistake for Boers. Helmets had been issued in their place. The drab tweeds, with their red facings, had gone the way of all things showy and conspicuous, and they had been put into ill-fitting khaki like any other Tommy.

One trooper, I believe, held on to a suit of his old tweed uniform for some time after, but he kept it in his kit-bag along with other useless treasures. He used to trot it out with unjustifiable pride on special occasions—generally when the "special war artists" were round collecting studies for pictures of battles which they hadn't seen.

That is why in most "sketches from the front" you see N.S.W. Lancers still wearing the plumes and looped-up hats, and trousers with double stripes down the side, and top-boots—or rather brown leather leggings which look like boot tops.

In point of fact they were the most unpicturesque chaps imaginable. Their lance

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pennants, at one time rolled round the stick and bandaged with khaki, had disappeared altogether. They were riding scrubby little Cape ponies, ~~not nearly up~~ to their weight, although a party had selected for Police horses. results of our stay in the country. The and had to take Military authorisation a horseman is ~~a horse~~ even if he has to ride a Cape pony, and these fellows had long since passed the stage at which they boggled over appearances.

Well, they went round to Rensburg and joined the rest of the squadron which had come out under Major Lee. Those of the Australian Horse Regiment who had been despatched from New South Wales as part of the Mounted Rifle unit were also placed under the same command.

Within a fortnight after the amalgamation the first disaster happened. They lost something like seventeen men at one fell swoop. A party about twenty strong sent out from Slingersfontein on the 16th of January, was ambuscaded and cut off. Sergeant-Major Griffin of the Australian Horse and Corporal Kilpatrick of the Lancers were killed. Lieutenant Dowling (Australian Horse) was badly

Mounted Troops

wounded, and, with nearly all the rest of his command, taken prisoner. Two or three men subsequently crawled back into camp in a more or less pitiable plight, having hid behind boulders while the Boers were collecting the captured horses. They all gave different versions of the affair, and I have heard twice as many more since ; but as I was not out with the party I don't profess to discriminate. It has been said that the accident might have been averted if Lieutenant Dowling had shown a little less pluck and made up for the deficiency in caution. Also that they didn't make quite as effective a stand as they might have done, because in the hurry of dismounting they forgot to withdraw their carbines from the buckets attached to the saddles. I don't know.

The bare facts, however, were that two or three of the party were sent out to examine a farm-house on one flank, and as they didn't rejoin their comrades within reasonable time, Dowling, with the rest of his command, went back to investigate. While searching for them the Boers found him, and his exact range also. He was fairly cornered, and the rest of the story, in common with the subsequent proceedings, is somewhat confused. They were out-numbered and out-maneuvred at every point. Dowling's right thumb was shot off, and a bullet passed through his cheek

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just below the eye ; but he made a break for safety, and even stopped to pick up a man whose horse had been shot under him. Somebody appears to have put up a white flag, and those who had not got away gave themselves up. In the meantime the three men for whom the party had been searching had got safely back to camp without firing a shot.

Lieutenant Dowling was taken in an ambulance to Colesburg Junction and subsequently transferred to Bloemfontein, where we found him in hospital when the Free State capital fell into our hands. The unwounded were sent up as far north as Waterval, and placed under guard with other of our prisoners of war. Two troopers, however—Ford and Whittington—managed to effect their escape to Delagoa Bay. Ford was an ex-Australian, who had been some years in the Transvaal, and joined his old regiment at Cape Town : consequently he knew something of the country. The pair dug a large hole in the exercise ground, and, selecting a favourable opportunity, secreted themselves therein by covering themselves over with loose earth. After an hour or so—it seemed to them an eternity—in this living grave they judged the time ripe to make a break for liberty. Nothing untoward happened. They escaped. By dint of travelling by night and lying perdu by day they covered a considerable

Mounted Troops

distance towards their goal, and finally got surreptitiously aboard a freight train, which carried them safely into port. The British Consul did the rest for them.

Now the N.S.W. Lancer is to his comrade in the Mounted Infantry what the Household Cavalryman is to the Boer. I have accompanied Australian Mounted Infantry right through the campaign and never heard of any of their number being ambuscaded, with the solitary exception of three West Australians who were captured by a clever dodge at a farmhouse near the Vaal River. We in Australia look with pride and admiration at the dashing Lancer, but our Mounted Infantry inspire confidence. They farm and fight with equal facility, and do both with more thoroughness than their South African prototypes. They have their being and their headquarters in the country districts. The Lancer generally hugs the towns. Both regiments belong to what we call the partially-paid section of our Defence Force—that is, they get the munificent Capitation Allowance of £6 per annum on which to keep their horses and pay their expenses when they come into town to drill. The Lancer, because he usually lives in town, can't always afford to keep a horse all the year round, so he hires one from the livery stable. The Mounted Rifleman usually

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has several about his farm, and keeps one for his military work. He will ride fifteen or twenty miles to the nearest rendezvous for a half day's parade, and stop behind to do a deal in cattle or horses or a bit of business in maize. He is as good a rough-rider as you will find in the country. He shoots remarkably well, and easily leads all competitors in *service matches*, which combine marksmanship with horsemanship. He is generally a man of some substance: possibly he lives on his own holding, employs a good deal of labour, owns a banking account and a large family, and pays a stiffer income-tax than his commanding officer.

He is a well-educated Boer, and more amenable to discipline than the Transvaal or Free State variety. He is as keen a horseman, but trained to working on foot as well.

He is, in short, a fine type of the irregular, with all the irregular's contempt for the mere drawing-room soldier. He won't salute his officer with the same punctiliousness as the regular, because he stands on terms of greater equality, and is a trifle sensitive of putting on what he calls "side." He is getting over this gradually as he mixes more with the world, but I don't know that he will be any the better fighter or farmer for it. He scouts better than his Imperial cousin, because he uses his head more and knows the Red Book

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less. As flanking guard to a moving column, for instance, he thinks less of what is laid down as the regulation distance from the column, and more of the necessity for creeping up to the edge of a kopje to see what lurks on the other side. Watch the British regular. He will travel for miles just under the dip of a ridge quite unconcerned as to anything outside his regulation beat. Tell him to make for a given point in the distance. He will do it if he can keep his eye on the objective, but a depression in the ground, or an intervening fence which cannot be cut, will throw him out of gear nine times out of ten. He doesn't observe natural features of the country as he proceeds, and consequently cannot find his way back. In short, he isn't a bushman, and no one expects him to do the impossible.

To my mind, Imperial Mounted Infantry, as at present constituted, can never be more than infantry mounted. This may be regarded as a somewhat fine distinction by the English reader, but the difference will be detected by Colonials. In Australia a horse is an essential part of a Mounted Infantryman's equipment all the year round; in England he is only mounted for the purposes of a campaign, or, at the most, for a few months' training each year. He is detached from a line regiment to do special work, and

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when that is over he goes back to the ranks. He can't be called a horseman by the wildest stretch of imagination. Very often he doesn't know the crest from the crupper, and he certainly does not understand the general management of horses. Consequently he distresses both himself and his mount unnecessarily, and daily curses the fates which have raised him to the doubtful dignity of a trooper.

On long marches I have frequently seen them turn their horses adrift, fully accoutred, when a favourable chance offered, and then report the "loss" to their sergeant, in the fervent hope that they would be allowed to walk instead of ride. Anyone travelling behind a Mounted Infantry column might easily keep himself in horseflesh, if it were not for that awkward broad arrow which is branded on the shoulder or rump of all Government mounts. Moreover, if the owner loses his horse legitimately, he won't look round too eagerly for another. He doesn't want one badly enough.

The Australian Mounted "Rifle"—as he is called, in contradistinction to "Infantry"—is lost without his horse, just as much as the Boer. He will never walk when he can ride. He will nurse a cast-off horse into decent condition on the line of march, working it every day, and, given decent saddlery, there

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won't be many sore backs in his regiment. Between De Aar, Prieska and Orange River, the N.S.W. Mounted Rifles, under Captain Antill, covered about 300 miles by march route and reached their destination without losing an animal, and with only one sore back, which had been caused by an ill-fitting saddle. Other mounted regiments counted sore backs by the dozen, to say nothing of the horses that had actually died on the road.

I don't know that the comparison tends so much to the credit of the Colonial as to pure accident. He might have had the luck, or bad luck—whichever you like—to have been born in a less "horsey" country than Australia, but it all goes to show how much more efficient Imperial Mounted Infantry would become if they knew a little more about horseflesh, and they can only learn through *constant association with horses.*

CHAPTER VI

PRIESKA TO PAARDEBERG

Amid the middle of January the detachment of S.A.W. Mounted Rifles—then at De Aar—was ordered to Prieska. At that time you wouldn't have found Prieska marked on one intelligence map in ten, but it has become more important since. Situated on the Orange River, about 190 miles due west of Hopetown, and 120 north west of De Aar, it was then a sort of rendezvous for all the rebellious spirits hovering round the district known as Griqualand, and the loyal residents were having rather a bad time of it.

Our little party, under Captain Antill, numbered something under 100. We had no guns or infantry with us—no nothing—and it was our first move off the lines of communication. Either the authorities must have had unlimited confidence in our resource, or they didn't appreciate the possibilities of the situation. One cannot adequately appreciate half those possibilities until he has groped about on the limitless South African veldt for a few

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months, hundreds of miles from anywhere. Prieska is some few thousand miles out of any tourist beat. There are no finger-posts to show you which road to take, and no policemen to inquire from. More hopeless, God-forsaken country never broke the heart of the farmer. We have some similar to it in parts of Australia, but, thank heaven, very little. It is a mere useless waste, incapable of sustaining a bandicoot in anything like decent condition. And yet it appears to pay someone to breed ostriches in that district, for there are hundreds about, and they are said to return their owners a nett profit of about £3 per head per annum. Goats, too, live on it and thrive ; they pay better than sheep. The most curious feature about this country, however, is the fact that, whenever you come across an Englishman's farmhouse you generally find it surrounded by beautifully green trees—the only timber within hundreds of miles. Apparently water can be had for the sinking, and yet none is used for irrigation. I should make one important exception, viz., at Houwater, a farm run by the Smartt Syndicate. These people have struck a few acres of decent land and gone in for irrigation on a big scale. They have a big sheet of water dammed up between the kopjes, which is more than enough to feed the whole farm, and after thirteen months of hard work with

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modern appliances, they have made the desert to blossom like the rose. I forget how much they spent on that dam—something like £8000 or £9000, I believe—but it has repaid them. The first year's crop of wheat was phenomenal. Mr Swan, the manager, is quite a modern farmer, and, by a strange irony of fate, he has in his employ an old man named Brit who, ages ago, founded the little Dutch village called Britstown which lies midway between Houwater and De Aar. Britstown is one of the Dutchiest of Dutch hamlets. You could count the English residents on the fingers of both hands. Most of the Dutch houses look like chapels, and the occupants shut themselves up every night after dusk to sing and pray. There is this peculiar kink in their professed morality, however—they are confirmed kleptomaniacs. English storekeepers say that they watch their Dutch customers most carefully while they are in the shop, and instead of kicking up a fuss, quietly charge for all the small articles that they have *seen* abstracted surreptitiously. The customers always pay.

Between Houwater and Prieska is one other halting-place—Omdraai's Vlei. It is an ostrich farm, store, post-office and blacksmith's shop all rolled into one and kept by a Mr Devenish. Five miles further on, where you don't halt, is Doornbergfontein, a second

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edition of Omdraai's Vlei, kept by a Mr Green, who, in addition to other occupations, is also a sort of law-agent. Then Prieska, a pretty little town on the banks of the Orange River, with court-house and gaol, and all the other evidences of advanced civilisation.

Imagine yourself for a moment one of a party of eighty-five or ninety sent out over a hundred miles of such country as this, to occupy a little village supposed to be held by rebels and surrounded by rebels. Take away from the eighty-five your advance and rear guards, and flanking patrols, and a baggage guard, and where is your fighting strength? You are in the middle of what is now practically an enemy's country, and cut off from all communication, without any base nearer than De Aar. It *was* rather a big order, but it was entrusted to a body of men who fortunately knew their work and were very keen on it. From what has transpired since, I often wonder what would have happened to this little column if it had been composed entirely of Imperial Mounted Infantry?

We reached the neighbourhood of Prieska one morning—about the 21st of July, I think—considerably before daylight, and all available men were posted under splendid cover to await developments. Very soon after dawn we were able to distinguish bands of rebels

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on the northern side of the river. We were on the south, but north and south were connected by a pont—or punt as we should call it in Australia—and a deep crossing over which one could swim horses. Of course we opened fire and quickly sent those rebels flying in all directions. They made some attempt at replying, but were unable to locate us precisely, and rode off north, carrying a few wounded with them. Not content with dispersing the rebel troops, Captain Antill made an excursion across the river, and after surrounding a farmhouse closely, captured seven or eight prisoners who were sent back to De Aar and Cape Town. He also took possession of a fine mob of sheep and other "accessories," such as a Cape cart and horses.

We settled down in Prieska for a few days and rested both men and horses. The local cricket club took us on at our favourite game. New South Wales closed her first innings with 170 for eight wickets, then took the field. Prieska made seventeen in their first and twenty-four in their second innings. But we couldn't stop and enjoy their hospitality long. While we were cricketing the rebels were collecting themselves for a spring, and as they were coming on in considerable numbers we agreed to play Prieska the return match at some more convenient opportunity. For the present our game was to retire on Britstown,



Photo by

(the Author

FIRST AID TO BOER WOUNDED

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and we were none too soon out of danger. The rebels occupied the town an hour after we left, and made things rather unpleasant for the loyal residents who had given us any assistance. Captain Antill retreated as far as Houwater and wired for reinforcements. Here he was joined by Colonel Alderson with some Cape Garrison Artillery and Imperial Mounted Rifles, to the number of something like 1000, and a fresh start was made for Prieska.

It was a bit mystifying to the loyal settlers on the line of route to find us backing and filling in this unsatisfactory manner. They had been threatened with all sorts of penalties if they gave the English any sort of assistance, and were in hourly dread of something worse than capture. Some had sent their wives and families away for safety, and were half inclined to pack up themselves. But the appearance of a strong force heading north again reassured them somewhat. Obviously a handful of eighty-five men could not hold Prieska and the country between that and De Aar long, but 1000!—surely they were safe now. Alas! for their fond hopes. Colonel Alderson's column marched into Prieska and marched out again, under orders for Hopetown and Orange River Station. We were in the town about three hours, and got away one

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morning before daylight. It looked rather shame-faced to sneak out so unostentatiously, but we had our orders, and Prieska woke up that day to find itself unprotected once more. The settlers on the road over which we had travelled remained for some time in blissful ignorance of our departure, for we had cut across country due east, and some of them only found out to the contrary when the rebels swooped down upon them and took several prisoners. They gave the loyal people of Prieska what they didn't want—eight days to clear out, and took possession of the country between there and Omdraai's Vlei.

In the meantime Colonel Alderson was calmly marching his men by long stages to Hopetown. A few miles out he passed an ox convoy in charge of one officer and fourteen Rimington scouts. This supply column consisted of forty wagons, each drawn by sixteen bullocks, and each bullock worth about £20, to say nothing of the wagons—and all this valuable property protected by a lieutenant and fourteen men! This in the middle of country practically given over to the rebels.

The column reached Orange River Station on February 2nd. The N.S.W. portion of it had covered about 300 miles since leaving De Aar a fortnight previously, and came out with only one sore-backed horse—a splendid tribute

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to the manner in which the men were handled. At one stretch we covered thirty-three miles of horribly rough country, but then our horses had been carefully shod all round, while horses belonging to some other corps included in this column had only their forefeet shod, and half of them were dead lame long before they reached their destination. Little things like this tell on a long march, and it is generally the little things that are overlooked by those unaccustomed to the treatment of horses.

On reaching our destination we went into camp for an hour or two, having been ordered to hold ourselves in readiness to proceed north at once. In those days orders were given and countermanded two or three times every twenty-four hours, and from the manner in which they issued instructions to us it was evident that they didn't quite know what position in the general scheme of things to assign to an isolated unit such as the N.S.W. Mounted Rifles. We were unattached to any body in particular—a solitary little command completely equipped for the road, and ready to go anywhere, but too small to be of any practical use in a general move forward. At this time, too, troops were being pushed up the line towards Modder River by thousands a day. Lord Roberts had arrived and he was about to make a dash for Bloemfontein. Regiments that could not be taken up by rail

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were marched up by road. Everyone was in a high state of excitement. Every man ordered north, whether by rail, wagon or horseback, or on foot, had to cross that huge railway bridge—the open floor of which had been boarded up by our Engineers to enable wagons and troops to cross. Half the camp was on one side of the river and half on the other. The approaches to the bridge were choked with railway trucks, wagons and horses all trying to cross at the same time. There were scenes of wild and indescribable confusion—engines colliding with bullock teams half way across; wagons, horses and men mixed up in a hopeless muddle 100 feet above the river bed, and huge gaps between the iron girders for you to fall through.

First of all we were ordered north, then told to stand fast, and finally sent out to a little place called Ramah, twelve miles east, on the northern bank of the river, and consequently just inside the Free State border. We were to protect Mr Attwell's farm and clear any marauding Boers from that locality. Leaving Orange River on the 4th of February we reached Ramah the same day, and remained there until the 9th, when we made north to join the main column, which was crossing from Modder River to Bloemfontein. Several skirmishes took place on the road—one before leaving Ramah, a second at Klipdrift on the

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16th, and the third at a place called Klipkraal on the 17th. The men were on half rations and horses on 4lbs. each per day. Then we came up with Cronje's rearguard near Paardeberg, and kept him in sight until he went into laager.

CHAPTER VII

ADDITIONAL AUSTRALIAN CONTINGENTS

WHEN the first lot of troops for the front cleared the various colonial ports, Australia breathed a sigh of relief and contentment. She felt that she had done the right thing, and never doubted but that her sons would do credit to her wherever they happened to be sent. But few people gave a second thought to further contingents. The N.S.W. Premier, I recollect, did say something to the effect that if England wanted any more troops the Colonies would send as many as she required. This was on the occasion of the despatch of the first lot—a time of unprecedented enthusiasm, when public speeches teemed with patriotic promises, when public streets waved bunting from every other window, and when private subscriptions poured into patriotic funds. The Sydney *Daily Telegraph* opened a list for the insurance of the N.S.W. Lancers, in conjunction with Colonel Burns, the officer commanding that regiment. The fund grew to such proportions that it was eventually

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decided to enlarge its scope. Every man sent out was to be covered in the sum of £200, and the Mutual Life Assurance Company of Australasia offered to accept the risk at five per cent., agreeing to refund all premiums over and above the total amount of claims paid at the end of the campaign. Places of amusement gave Soldiers' Benefit nights ; officers and men on leaving were breakfasted and lunched and dined at their friends' expense, and after they had got well away on their sea voyage the womenfolk set to work with needles and thread to make nice warm clothing for them.

But in course of time it dawned upon the military leaders at the front that, after all, these "rough and ready" troops from Australia might be of some practical value in the campaign, especially as it promised to last as many months as they originally thought it would last weeks. A second lot of mounted men was offered to the Imperial Government, and this time "gladly accepted." Before many months had elapsed we were actually invited to equip more men and send them out at the expense of Great Britain.

The antipodean colonies became recruiting grounds for the army in South Africa. Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Brisbane, Perth, Auckland and Hobart instituted standing camps for the reception, testing and outfitting of volunteers, and those who couldn't get into

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the second contingents hung on in the hope of being included in the third or fourth. The hapless individuals who "missed the 'bus" every time were kept under arms as "England's Last Hope"—they were ready in case of a national emergency. Fortunately their services were not required.

Our second lot from New South Wales was not rushed to the Cape in the same promiscuous manner as the first. The Government had more time on hand to arrange for transport, and it had learned a little from past experience. A battery of permanent Artillery, with six guns, under Colonel Sydenham Smith, R.A., was despatched, also another half unit of our Medical Corps and three companies of Mounted Infantry, a squadron of Australian Horse, and other details to reinforce units already at the front. With these went the necessary complement of horses, wagons, etc., and a small party of trained nurses drawn from our public hospitals.

Our Mounted Infantry sent out with this detachment were not drawn from any particular regiment or corps. They were commanded by an Imperial Infantry officer who at the time was adjutant to our 1st Regiment of Foot. Among the officers were Artillerists, Mounted Rifles, Army Service Corps men and infantry. The major portion of the rank and file had never passed through any regular

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course of military training as mounted infantry, but they were picked riders and good shots—not the variety which puts up “possibles” on the rifle range: in all probability not half of them were members of rifle clubs or knew the use of the oil-pot and the blow-pipe. Among them were police constables and mechanics, farmers and ordinary station hands, country newspaper reporters and “comps”—a heterogeneous collection, half citizen, half soldier—no polish to speak of, but lots of grit and resource. They were more of an experiment than the original consignment, which was drawn largely from the partially-paid ranks.

The squadron of Australian Horse was detached from our only regiment of purely Volunteer Cavalry. Most of those selected for service had had the advantage of one year's training, including a nine days' continuous course at Easter. The Artillery unit consisted entirely of permanent officers and men.

Then came the “Bushmen,” a corps of boundary-riders, station-hands, fencers, shearers and general “rouseabouts”—all those occupations, in fact, which go to make up life in the “back-blocks” of Australia. It was after we had, on our own initiative, despatched one contingent to the seat of war, and were busy on the next, that, under pressure of affairs at

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the Cape, the idea of thorough-going Bushmen presented itself. To Major J. Randall Carey, Chairman of the Sydney *Daily Telegraph* Newspaper Company, belongs the credit for initiating the movement. The first friend to whom he mentioned the subject put down £3000 towards the scheme; a few days subsequently another £5000 was promised, with an offer of "more if required," and with this generous and excellent start Major Carey approached the Government. The Premier at once concurred—treasurers and secretaries were appointed. A meeting was held in January at the Pastoralists' Union rooms, when the chairman announced the receipt of £16,650. A sum of £226 was subscribed in the room, and over £30,000 was subsequently contributed by New South Wales alone. In the meantime some Australians in London had thought of the same thing. They approached the Agent-General, who in his turn cabled the N.S.W. Premier, and finally the scheme was set on foot as an Australasian movement. A thousand Mounted Bushmen left our shores a few weeks later under the command of Colonel H. P. Airey, D.S.O., an officer who for years past had held command of our permanent Field Battery of Artillery.

They hadn't been gone long when Mr Chamberlain actually asked for more. He cabled to the Premier of New South Wales,

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and through him to the various Colonial Governments, in the following terms:—

“Her Majesty’s Government requires an additional force of 2000 men, of a similar kind to the Bushmen, for general service anywhere in South Africa, and they are confident that Australia will respond patriotically to this further call. Realising the magnitude of the efforts already made by the Australian colonies, Her Majesty’s Government proposes to defray expenses of arming, equipping, mounting and transporting the force, but owing to the pressure caused by the war, should be glad if the Colonial Governments would make arrangements on their behalf, recovering expenses at a later date. Probably the force may be employed outside Natal and Cape Colony, in which case privates are to be paid five shillings a day, other ranks at proportionate rates. Telegraph earliest possible date at which such a force would be ready to embark, with full details as to composition.”

Cabinet meetings were held all over Australia. New South Wales proposed that all colonies should act in unison. West Australia telegraphed back, “Am with you heart and soul.” Similarly other colonies. More than the requisite number of volunteers were soon on hand, and finally a force 2500

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strong, called the "Imperial Bushmen," came into existence. They were commanded by Colonel Mackay, vice-President of the N.S.W. Executive Council, and Officer Commanding the Australian Horse.

At this stage it will be seen the Imperial Government no longer "preferred infantry" to mounted troops. Light was slowly penetrating through the closed shutters of the "good old War Office." The first lot of infantry from New South Wales had actually been turned into a mounted unit before this. Fortunately a large majority of them were more than ordinarily good riders, as compared with Imperial troops, although they belonged to infantry regiments, and it was hardly necessary to try them first of all on mules. About fifteen or twenty per cent. would have been none the worse for a previous course of equitation, but they speedily accustomed themselves to the new order of things, and in a month's time they were expert horsemen. Along with other units comprising the Australian Regiment they were sent from Enslin round to Rensburg, and fought their way right up *via* Colesberg, Norval's Pont, Jagersfontein and Fauresmith to Bloemfontein.

The second batch of Mounted Infantry reached Cape Town on February 17th, and after a week's rest in camp were hurried up to Modder River. On Sunday, March 4th,

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they were on the road heading for Osfontein to join Lord Roberts's main column, and before many days they got into a very warm corner. Their outposts were attacked on the 6th, when two Queenslanders were brought into camp wounded. The Boers, to the number of about 200, then retired, and New South Wales followed in pursuit. Reaching an adjacent range of kopjes the enemy split up in small extended parties, six miles ahead. Their position was a strong one, but the Mounted Infantry determined to attack, and two companies were advanced, dismounted, for that purpose, the remainder of the regiment standing by until the enemy's disposition could be more accurately determined. Finally it was deemed inadvisable to force the position, and the troops were withdrawn—one officer and four men wounded. It was a mere nothing as compared with subsequent engagements, but interesting as showing what a raw Colonial regiment could do by way of a first engagement. It acted entirely alone on this occasion, and every man behaved with the greatest steadiness imaginable. At Paardeberg they were joined by the first contingent of Mounted Rifles, who, in recognition of their having first located Cronje, were given precedence over other troops in the matter of entering the laager when the capitulation took place.

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In the meantime the second contingent of Australian Horse and Lancers had also been sent up from the base to join General French's command. Both units were attached to the Scots Greys, who formed portion of the First Cavalry Brigade. The Lancers took part in the relief of Kimberley, forming the advance guard and right flanking patrol to the column on that eventful march, and with the Carabiniers headed the procession through the Diamond City.

The second half unit of our Medical Corps, which had also reached South Africa about this time, was brought round from Stormberg to Modder River, and across country to intercept the main column. We established field hospitals at Kimberley and along the route to Bloemfontein. So that all our troops were gradually converging on one point, and in proportion as its concentration took place, so their influence became more and more felt.

Our Bushmen, on the other hand, were shipped round to Beira to join General Carrington, who was operating on the northern border of the Transvaal; our Artillery—this crack battery, the pride of New South Wales—what were they doing all this time? This has been one of the puzzles of the campaign. The battery was equipped with six modern guns, commanded by an R.A. officer and manned by perfectly-trained gunners—all

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members of our permanent Artillery force in New South Wales. And then we expected such great things from it. At one time there was considerable argument as to whether the battery ought not to have been sent out first of all, in preference to Mounted Infantry. When it landed at Cape Town, and was ordered up to the front, nobody doubted that it would give an excellent account of itself, but within a couple of weeks it had been split up into three fragments. Two guns were posted at Enslin, two at Kloofontein, and two at Belmont. There they remained for weeks. Suddenly they were once more brought together and sent up to Prieska. That was the end of them so far as I have been able to gather. From time to time letters from Gunner A or Gunner X have appeared in the N.S.W. papers, dated Prieska and Kenhardt, to the effect that they have been languishing in the wilderness without any work to do for months, and so far as I know they have neither fired a shot nor seen a shot fired during the campaign.

CHAPTER VIII

COLESBERG OPERATIONS

THE Australian Regiment left Enslin on January 30th for Naauwpoort, and went into camp for a week at this junction, so that they might be properly fitted out with horses. Here the N.S.W. Infantry unit was put on horseback for the first time, and finally the regiment found its way up to Arundel, where General Clements took them under his wing. From Arundel right up to Bloemfontein they fought a series of small running skirmishes with Boer outposts, winning their way from point to point by slow and painful degrees, and by dint of hard work. There was no big engagement during this long march—nothing which will stick long in the public memory—but by it Australia lost some of her best and most promising officers. One day's work differed slightly from the previous day, in so far as it covered fresh ground, but it was one continual snipe, snipe, snipe from dawn to dusk. A few “sample” days will afford all

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the detail that is required to make up the picture.

On February 19th the regiment camped at Arundel in a deluge of rain. The following morning was ushered in by the booming of a gun which the Boers had mounted on a kopje called Vulture Hill—a large, conical eminence four miles to the east of the Australian camp. The shells fell harmlessly among the tents. The South Australians turned out in support of our artillery and soon silenced the Boer piece. But a fresh gun opened on us from Taibosch Hill to the north, and the shells began to drop uncomfortably close to the West Australians' horse lines on Epsom Hill—our northern outpost—and soon our camp was engaged on all sides, with the exception of the south, the firing line having a circumference of no less than twenty-five miles. Shortly after 8 a.m. Captain M'Leish (Victoria), with 166 Australians, accompanied by six 15-pounders R.H.A., and a company of Inniskillings left to reinforce Berk's Hill. On reaching their objective, Captain Salmon (Victoria), Lieutenant Dove (New South Wales), and Captain Haig (Inniskillings), each with a small party of men, were detailed to escort four guns, while Captain Howland (South Australia), with his small command, remained on the hill to support the other two, which were now exchanging shrapnel with the

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enemy. Captain M'Leish was sent over to occupy a kopje to the right and attack the enemy's left flank. Captain Legge (New South Wales) was meanwhile ordered over to take Horseshoe Kopje, a long low ridge to the left. Working round by Wolvfontein Farm they soon came under a heavy fire, but reached cover without casualty. Arrived here, the spot which they had been ordered to occupy, a message came over almost immediately to retire to the former position. They retired, only to find, after running the gauntlet of the Boer rifles again, that the order had been misconstrued by the messenger, and they were once more sent back to Horseshoe Kopje. The Boers retreated from kopje to kopje until, at dusk, we gave up the pursuit. Lieutenant Staughton (Victoria), and his handful of men, who had been acting as advance guard, did excellent work. He himself had some narrow shaves. His helmet was pierced by a Mauser bullet: four others penetrated his haversack, and still another struck the Mauser revolver at his hip, exploding one of the cartridges in the magazine.

Captain M'Leish in the meantime had advanced over the kopjes to the right. The Boers were gradually driven back, until at six o'clock M'Leish and Legge came into touch with the Boers in strong force on their right front. For nearly an hour a hail of rifle and

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shrapnel bullets rent the air. Darkness set in, and the Australians returned to camp after a hard day's work. About nine o'clock it was suddenly discovered that Sergeant-Major Healy, with sixteen Victorians, had been accidentally forgotten in the general retirement. Two troopers went out to find them and bring them back; finally, about midnight, they all sauntered into camp.

The West Australians, during the afternoon, had stuck valiantly to Epsom Hill. Captain Moor kept his men well under cover, lying all day under a heavy artillery and rifle fire. He only lost one horse. The Boer Vickers-Maxim hailed its 1-pound shells on the kopje for hours. The Worcesters and Royal Irish went out to meet the western attack, and were covered by two batteries of the Royal Artillery. A few shells were sent over our way in reply, but the Boer guns were soon silenced.

Next morning one of our 5-inch siege guns had been placed in position on the north of the camp, and its third discharge of lyddite had the desired effect. Our other 5-inch gun fired two shells from the camp on the eastern side; it was then taken over to the west and shelled the enemy for the rest of the day. These guns were evidently a surprise to them.

On Wednesday our Artillery were engaged the whole day at the western outpost, with

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the N.S.W. Infantry (mounted) as escort. About noon a patrol of twenty South Australians left Berk's Hill to visit Looster's Farm, about three miles from camp. At this place they found about forty Boers in an adjacent kopje, who opened a smart fire. The South Australians were forced to retire, leaving one man behind, killed. The patrol party, on its way out, had divested themselves of, and left behind, their great-coats and blankets. In the hurried retreat they were unable to recover their belongings. At dusk our casualty was picked up by the ambulance.

Thursday was little more than a repetition of Wednesday. We occupied the position which the Boers had just vacated hurriedly, and shelled them for the major portion of the day ; then just before dusk the whole Boer column fell back on Kuilfontein. The Victorian Second Contingent, which, since its arrival a few days previously, had been in camp at Hanover Road, had marched from that place to join their comrades, and now put in an appearance on the left flank of the column, where they were joined by the Tasmanians.

On Friday and Saturday we gained further ground, and vigorously shelled the enemy's position at Kuilfontein. A stiff fight took place on the latter day, and from the fact that the enemy occupied Vaal Kop, from which they could enfilade our right flank, we

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had several casualties. Our 5-inch gun had searched this kopje with lyddite during the day without getting a reply; but as our men approached Plewman's Farm a heavy rifle fire was opened upon them, soon to be supplemented by a fusilade from behind a wall connecting Vaal Kop with the farm. Captain Lascelles (South Australia), in charge of about 140 of the Prince Alfred Guard, took refuge in a slit for three hours. The men were safe here until the enemy brought a big gun to bear upon them. Then there was a hurried rush for the rear, during which two men were badly wounded and eight taken prisoners, while twelve horses were shot. Those who had been dismounted were gallantly taken up behind their comrades, and thus escaped. Captain Holmes (New South Wales) had his men ranged along the veldt in the rear, and was under heavy fire most of the day. The Bedfords, still on the kopje, were unable to move until dark—the unlooked-for flank attack from Vaal Kop had placed them in an awkward position. Holmes covered their retreat, and finally, at dusk, brought his men out: but there was no sleep for them that night. Riding carefully over the broken country, in a blinding rain, they were soon enveloped in pitch darkness, and not unnaturally found themselves completely "bushed." Rather than run the risk of riding into the Boer lines, Holmes halted

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his men where they stood, and waited with what patience he could muster for the morrow's dawn. It was cold and wet and utterly miserable: they were unable to lie down without risk of drowning, for the veldt was completely inundated; and for the same reason, to say nothing of the danger, they could not light camp fires. They reached the spot where the rest of the regiment was camped at seven o'clock next morning—Sunday.

There was no fighting that day. Technically speaking, the column was "resting." That is to say, it spent the day in shifting camp from one place to another. Next morning a reconnoitring party went out towards Kuilfontein, and found that the enemy had retired further north to Taibosch Hill. Following upon this we made a reconnaissance in force towards Rensburg. A detachment of the West Australians was sent to occupy Jasfontein, to the east, while the Victorians went in support of the Artillery. The guns poured a devastating fire upon Taibosch Hill, which drove the enemy out. They made a rush for Vaal Kop, but the Inniskillings, divining their intention, also made a break for the same spot, and won by a neck. The Boer flank was turned: they were driven back and beyond Rensburg, which town we at once proceeded to occupy. Captain



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M'Leish, with the Victorians, was the first to enter. They bivouacked there overnight, and in the morning, having been joined by the main body, pressed on to Colesberg. The railway line right away up had been ruthlessly torn up by the Boers; there was not a single culvert or bridge left standing. The wrecked trucks of stores, which had been cut adrift some weeks previously at Rensburg, and afterwards gallantly fired by the New Zealanders, lay in grotesque confusion near Plewman's Siding, with a dead Kaffir alongside still unburied.

The kopjes to right and left were reported as unoccupied, so the column pushed hurriedly through the narrow "nek" towards Colesberg Junction. The hurry in this case was not prompted by fears of surprise so much as the danger of disease. This "poort," or pass, had been a veritable valley of death for the Boers. In one group alone lay twenty dead horses, evidently killed simultaneously by one of our shells. We did not loiter here. Pushing past the Junction, our troops at 2 p.m. reached the beautiful little town of Colesberg, where they were almost overwhelmed by the enthusiasm of the residents. Many of the more prominent, including the clergyman, had been imprisoned by the Boers for over three months, and were only set free at our approach.

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Some of the Australians paid a visit to the scene of the fight at Pink Hill, where they found the bodies of several comrades lying just as they had fallen, save that the Boers had relieved them of everything of value, even down to their boots. Major Eddy (Victoria) and Lieutenant Powell (South Australia) were among those found. All were decently buried in the orthodox fashion. The Victorian chaplain conducted the services.

For the next five days the column was kept continually on the move, but there was next to no fighting. The men bivouacked at Achtertang one night, at Van Zyl the next, and on Wednesday, March 7th, came to a halt about a mile south of Norval's Pont. As everybody knows, the bridge had been effectually destroyed; the three centre spans lay a huddled heap of *debris* in the bed of the river. Boer "snipers" had lined the banks, keeping up a continuous dribbling fire.

On Monday, 12th March, the whole column took up a position on the kopjes overlooking the river, presenting a firing line of four or five miles. Soon we had twenty-two guns trained upon them, also two Maxims. Our riflemen, too, kept up a continuous fusilade for the greater part of the day, then—we returned to camp. In the meantime preparations were being hurried on for crossing the river. Our Engineers had done such excellent



Colesberg Operations

work in repairing the railway line that we now had trains running up as far as Van Zyl, with pontoons. At daybreak on Thursday, two half battalions of infantry were towed across the stream to protect the opposite bank. A new bridge was commenced about five miles below the damaged one, at a point where an old sluit protected its approach and afforded good cover. The first portion was launched at 6.30 a.m., and in half an hour the pontoons stretched half-way to the opposite bank. Then they commenced to leak, and several had to be replaced by barrel rafts. This meant serious delay. The structure was not completed until nearly six o'clock at night, but it must be remembered that this was the largest pontoon bridge constructed during the campaign. The river at this spot was 264 yards wide, and no less than fifty-two pontoons were required to complete the span. The Inniskillings led the column over by way of the new bridge, and Colonel Hoad followed with the Australian Regiment. The enemy was not then in sight. Galloping towards Donkerpoort, the Australians occupied all the kopjes in the vicinity, and the rest of our troops crossed in a body the following morning.

On Thursday, March 15th, there commenced a sixteen days' march to Bloemfontein, *via* Phillipolis and Fauresmith. We had little or

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nothing to do on the way but disarm the Free Staters whom we found at or near their farms.

During the early operations under Clements, in the first skirmish that took place between the Victorian Mounted Infantry and the enemy, near Rensburg, W. J. Lambie, Correspondent for *Melbourne Age*, was shot through the head, and died an hour afterwards. He appears to have ventured too near to a farmhouse which had not been properly scouted. The body was picked up and decently buried by Commandant De La Rey. Poor Lambie! He had awfully hard luck. After languishing for eight weeks at Enslin with the Australian Regiment, he went round to Rensburg, and fell before he had been there a fortnight. The photograph which faces this page shows Lambie outside his tent at Enslin ; he will be recognised as the figure on the right. The other is Captain Bruche, a Victorian Special Service officer, who fought with the Guards during the early part of the campaign, and subsequently became Quartermaster to the Australian Regiment.



Photo, by

[the Author]

CORRESPONDENTS' CAMP AT ENSLIN

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CHAPTER IX

TWO PICTURES

A MAJOR of the North Lancashires sits under his tarpaulin, at Klokfontein, on a scorching afternoon in December. Two or three young subalterns lounge about in various stages of undress. They are all smoking. At a table in one corner of the tent sits the Adjutant, in shirt sleeves, taking down on paper, particulars as to birth, residence, next-of-kin, etc., in regard to a batch of men who approach in single file. This for the purpose of the regimental "small-books"—little pamphlet arrangements which each man sews into the lining of his tunic, so that his officers may know with whom to communicate in case of death or other injury. At the other end a small, feeble-looking cottage piano leans against the tent pole, and in front of it, with an empty jam case for music-stool, sits the musical member of the mess. He is "vamping" to some air which the Sergeant-Major is humming over somewhat uncertainly, by way of re-

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hearsal for to-night's sing-song. There is an ice-chest in the corner, a table resting on four rickety corner posts, and a few chairs.

The Major, chair tilted back and feet on the table, looks out on the camp through clouds of tobacco smoke. Immediately in front are the men's tents looped up at the bottom to allow the air—and the dust—a free passage ; in the middle distance, the rails of the permanent way which links Cape Town with Modder River dance about most unstably in the shimmering heat; beyond, little quivering columns of brick-red sand career nimbly over the desert's parched surface in ever-enlarging eccentric curves, and curl themselves heavenward, like so many giant corkscrews seeking for some soft spot to enter. Beyond this again, mirage, and nothing but mirage.

A solitary horseman in khaki rides down the road to the right of the camp on his way south.

"Bring that man here," says the Major to one of his staff.

The youth addressed having executed the necessary turning movement, the pair put in an appearance at the tent door,

"Good afternoon," from the Major ; "sorry to bring you back, but it's the thing, you know, to report yourself to the Officer Commanding when passing through a camp. You have a pass, of course? Thank you." Reads. "'Mr —



Two Pictures

representing the —, has permission to proceed by road to Enslin and return.' That's all right. By the way, didn't we meet at Modder River the other day? Why, of course. I didn't recognise you at first. Orderly, take this gentleman's horse and give it a feed if there is one in camp, and I say! you at the piano! stop that infernal row; you can do all the tum-tumming you want later on. You can't stay, eh? Oh, but you must. I'm in command here, and I'm accustomed to being obeyed. Now what are you going to have? Some nice cool German beer? That's better. Orderly, get out a large bottle from the ice-chest and some of that Christmas cake. And now tell us all the news. What's Methuen doing? You newspaper fellows ought to know everything that's going? Your Australian chaps seem to be playing the game all right. I ran against some of them the other day and they struck me as really serviceable men. By the way, one of ours is out in your part of the world now, I believe, acting as adjutant to one of your infantry regiments, or something of the sort. Do you know him?" (And so on and so on for an hour). "Going? Oh, you mustn't think of it yet. Stop and have dinner with us; you can ride down to Enslin in an hour from here. Besides, we've got your horse, you know. We have you there."

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You see he was an autocrat of autocrats, even to the manner in which he dispensed the hospitality of the camp, but it is amongst such autocrats that the British Army finds its best fighting men.

At a table in a little room on a station platform some miles down the same line sits a Major of the Something or Other, frowning through a single eyeglass at some papers which lay in front of him. An orderly sits at a desk in the outer room which opens on to the platform. In a recess round the refreshment-room door sit groups of red-tabbed Staff officers with newspapers and cool drinks at their elbows. They are *talking* war. Over the way, on the opposite platform, are huge walls of biscuit boxes, immense stacks of forage and ammunition, a small private store with a large crowd of Tommies fighting for admission, bell-tents here, there and everywhere. The up-train from Cape Town has just come in, and the passengers are making for the refreshment-room. Nominally they have half an hour for dinner, but the train will probably remain for five or six. A non-commissioned officer is examining the passes as the people enter. Another is going through the train on a similar duty.

There is something which one of them doesn't quite understand. "You had better

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come and see the Commandant about this, sir."

"What do you want?" says the Major, with an aggressive intonation on the personal pronoun, and the air of a man who has suddenly discovered some new form of bacillus in his bed sheets.

The Person Addressed was not sure that he particularly wanted anything; he had come at the invitation of the non-commissioned officer.

"I thought you had better see his pass," interpolated this individual.

The Person Addressed produced a licence.

"This is no good," from the Major; "you can't go any further than this."

"But—"

"I have no time to argue the question; you newspaper correspondents are more dam nuisance than the whole of the British Army put together.

"What am I to do? Am I to stay here?"

"You can't stay without a permit."

"Must I go back?"

"You can't even do that without a permit."

"But I understood from Lord Stanley that I was to be allowed to join Lord Roberts's force; in fact, I have a telegram from him to that effect."

"Then why the devil didn't you say so before? Here you have been keeping me

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from my work for over an hour. I suppose you will have to have a pass" (writes one out).

You see, he also was an autocrat, but he belonged to that type from which the British Army draws the rank and file of its Press Censors. You find him at all the stations along the line of communication, and the general rule obtains here as elsewhere, that his aggressiveness increases in inverse ratio to his rank.

I remember being considerably amused with an R.S.O. (Railway Staff officer) at Rensburg when that station was the rail head of the line from Naauwpoort to Pretoria. He was also a Press Censor. He wore a crown on his shoulder strap, and a single pane of glass in his face. The hour had arrived for despatching the daily train to Naauwpoort, but he wanted a particular truck which happened to be on a siding hitched on to the rest. The guard was a mere civilian, who didn't wear khaki, and didn't even know how to salute. It did not, therefore, strike the Major that he was a man to be credited with ordinary common sense.

He stood on the platform, and, addressing the guard, delivered himself something to the following effect:—"Look heah, driver, just run these cars down out of this siding, then uncouple the last one, and run it down heah.



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Shunt these three trucks a little further back, and run these two into the shed ; then bring this single car over, and couple it on to the down train."

The guard did exactly as directed, and in the course of a quarter of an hour had got the rolling stock into such a perfect tangle that the train which had been made up couldn't move either way, and the car which had caused all the confusion was still separated from it by quite a dozen intervening trucks.

"Look heah, sir," yelled the Major, who by this time had developed a profuse perspiration, "I've a good mind to put you under arrest and place some of my own men in charge. I simply want this car getting on to the end of the train, and here you have turned the whole station upside down."

"Why didn't you tell me what you wanted," returned the guard, spitting contemptuously over the side of his engine.

CHAPTER X

PAARDEBERG TO BLOEMFONTEIN

IT was at Paardeberg that we buried Lieutenant Grieve, one of our Special Service officers. Poor Grieve ! He was one of the men New South Wales could have spared least —as enthusiastic a soldier as ever wore uniform, and even in the opinion of Imperial officers with whom he was associated, one of the most gallant. He had been given his company in the Black Watch just after the Magersfontein disaster—a time when the Highland Brigade seemed to be quite crumpled up—and he worked like a Trojan to pull them round. Everyone admired his pluck and was fired by his enthusiasm. At Koodoosberg, under General Macdonald, he narrowly escaped the fate which overtook him a few days later. He led his company against Cronje's trenches at Paardeberg, across open veldt and under a deadly hail of bullets, on that fatal day when so many lives were thrown away without apparent necessity. Grieve, although hit



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through the body, crawled out from cover to the assistance of one of his men. While thus engaged, he received another bullet through the head and a third through the chest. He was buried by his comrades of the N.S.W. Mounted Rifles, every one of whom had both loved and admired him for his pluck. Fifty of the men whom he so gallantly led that day sleep by his side, within a few hundred yards of Cronje's laager.

The day following, the Boer general threw up the sponge. By rapid stages the British troops had been sapping up to his trenches. On the northern side of the river the Canadians crept up to within 500 yards, then 400, and finally, on the morning of the capitulation, they were entrenched within 100 yards of their enemy. At dawn, while still digging, they were fired upon, and nine or ten fell over dead. The N.S.W. Medical Corps, then attached to headquarters column, brought up stretchers and ambulance wagons to recover the wounded. Major Fiaschi, in command of our men, was calmly supervising these operations, when his attention was suddenly drawn to the Boers. Not that they were firing upon the stretcher-bearers. On the contrary, they had thrown down their arms and thrown up their hands. A white flag was flown from the nearest line of trenches. The men wished to surrender themselves. Major Fiaschi

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finished attending to the patient with whom he was engaged, then walked deliberately up to the Boer trenches and ordered the men to file out and pile their arms. The trenches here were mere narrow slits in the sand, which widened out gradually to such proportions as to allow ample room for sleeping. Some of the men had bedding down there, and odds and ends of furniture. They were practically safe against shell fire, but they didn't appear to have had a surplusage of food. Two hundred of them climbed out of their burrows and gave up their rifles. They were placed under a strong guard. Two hours later Cronje made overtures to Lord Roberts, and an hour afterwards the siege was raised.

At Osfontein, a few miles nearer to the Free State capital, the N.S.W. Mounted Rifles were mere spectators of the fight—held in readiness for an emergency which never occurred. The Lancers were with General French, who made a big turning movement on the right of the main column, and kept the enemy continually on the go. We followed them up to Driefontein, where they again showed fight. The Mounted Infantry Brigade was on the extreme right, employed in driving the enemy from kopje to kopje. In these gallops across the open veldt the men were continually exposed to a very hot fire, but there was no sign of wavering. With dusk the N.S.W. ambulances



Drawn by Norman H. Hardy

Sketch by Frank Wilkinson

MAJOR FIASCHI AT PAARDEBERG



Paardeberg to Bloemfontein

came in, bringing in Captain Bennett, who had been shot through the leg, and five of our wounded men. "A" Squadron N.S.W. Mounted Rifles, which had been operating on the left flank in the neighbourhood of Abraham's kraal, came out with one killed, and this man's name, by a strange coincidence, happened to be Abrahams. Colonel Umphelby, a Victorian Special Service officer, attached to the 86th Battery, was killed during this engagement. His body was afterwards brought into Bloemfontein for burial. He appears to have been hit by a stray bullet at long range, but it penetrated the liver, and he died two days later.

The second batch of Australian Horse received its baptism of fire at Osfontein. They were under a very heavy shell fire for half an hour or so, while acting as escort to our Artillery. Trooper Palmer, although shot in the forehead, continued to sit his horse, and could hardly be persuaded to go to the rear. I saw him later in hospital at Poplar Grove outside his tent, with a bandage over the spot where the bullet had entered. It was embedded somewhere in the brain, the doctor said—"a most curious case"—and yet the man was walking about as though nothing had happened.

From this to Bloemfontein we had very little more fighting, but heaps of discomfort.

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The whole of the troops had been without tents or blanket shelters since leaving the railway line at Modder River, and this during the very wet season of the year. On one occasion—from 2 p.m. on March 14th to 3 a.m. the following morning—our Mounted Rifles were kept standing to their horses in pouring rain, awaiting orders—thirteen solid hours of acute misery. We slept night after night in veritable quagmires, and existed on little more than a biscuit and a half per day. Listen to the tale of woe as told by a matter-of-fact regimental sergeant in his pocket-diary:—

“*March 6th.*—Osfontein. Marched all day. Outpost duty at night; raining hard. No fodder for horses.

“*March 7th.*—Employed as escort to Artillery; started 2 a.m. in pouring rain. Fight commenced 6 a.m. Drove enemy in front of us till 5 p.m., and bivouacked on ground; still raining. Two biscuits per man issued.

“*March 8th.*—Poplar Grove. Weather clearing a little. Reveille 4 a.m. Stood to arms till sunrise.

“*March 10th.*—Sharp fighting all day. No rations at night. Horses rapidly falling off in condition. Nos. 187, 29, 48, 63, 121 abandoned.

“*March 11th.*—Outpost duty all day and

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night. Rain came on again at midday, and still continues.

“*March 12th.*—Marched all day and nearly all night, on a biscuit each.

“*March 13th.*—Arrived about 6 a.m. some twelve or fourteen miles from Bloemfontein—men, horses and mules having been on march since 6 a.m. on 10th inst. Mules, 2lbs. oats daily; horses, 4lbs. Ordered to march at 2 p.m. Left at 3 a.m. on 14th; rained all night.

“*March 14th.*—Arrived in view of Bloemfontein, and camped about four miles west of town. Very wet; camp flooded; no tents or covering of any kind. Mules and horses still on 2lbs. and 4lbs. oats respectively.

“*March 15th.*—Raining night and day; camp ankle-deep in slush. Sickness increasing fast; dysentery and cramps.

“*March 16th.*—Notified in orders that full rations would now be issued. Camp quiet; work still heavy, and weather bad. Enteric fever breaking out badly in regiment.”

It is a bald, cold-blooded record—nearly brutal in places—of what happened on this historic march; but no one complained, and everyone grumbled at being put on the sick-list. Only the civilians who were looking on criticised. They suggested that during all this wet weather some of the troops might have been lodged in the empty houses about

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the place ; but there was not nearly accommodation enough for all, and it would scarcely have done to discriminate. Every effort was made to hurry the tents round from the Modder River side, and nothing more seemed possible. But men were dying by scores daily, and the streets were seldom free from funeral processions ; until finally, in order that the army should not be too much alarmed, they began to convey bodies secretly to the cemetery and bury them after dusk. Perhaps I should hardly say "secretly" — the better word would be "unostentatiously." Wagon-loads of white-faced privates, just sickening with fever, dragged round from one hospital to another ; but generally they were confronted by orderlies whose faces said as clearly as any placard could have done, "Standing-room only." Every available public building was turned into a reception-house for invalids.

Col. Williams, now Principal Medical Officer to the Australian and New Zealand forces, got possession of the Old Barracks, which face the Bloemfontein Fort, and quickly knocked light and air enough into it to make it fairly habitable. He had a door put in here and a window there, and ran up a galvanized iron structure at the back, and away from the main building, for the separate treatment of enteric cases. Every bed was soon filled, and then the officers gave up their quarters to make more room.

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While there was a possibility of taking in a patient, no one was turned away because he happened to belong to this brigade or the other; and so considerately were they all treated, that there was always a scramble for admission here. Tommies went about with tickets sewn into their tunics bearing the words, "If sick or wounded, please take me to the N.S.W. Hospital." Some of our leading physicians and surgeons had given up their practices at home, and came out to assist the Army Medical Corps staff. In fact, everything within reason seemed to have been done, both here and in other institutions, to cope with the phenomenal influx of patients.

Of course, there were bound to be many cases of individual hardship; but so far as I could see the only solid ground of complaint was against some Royal Army Medical Corps officers, who refused admission to men sorely needing treatment because they belonged to some other regiment or brigade—whose hospital, by the way, might have been full to overflowing. I have seen a wounded man at death's door brought into a field hospital—not at Bloemfontein—and allowed to lie for half an hour unattended while the officers argued among themselves as to whether he ought to be admitted. I have also known of cases where deaths may reasonably be attributed to premature removals from one hospital to another.

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But this sort of thing happens in civil as well as military hospitals ; and I imagine that, on the whole, our medical services were not quite so bad as they have been painted.

The principal differences between the Colonial and Imperial organisations were that we took in anybody who applied for admission while the others haggled, and that we kept further ahead with our Mounted Bearer Sections than they did. Captain Roth, I believe, was the only medical officer who, with his men and wagons, could keep up with General French on those long forced marches between Modder River and Bloemfontein. How those fellows worked ! When others were settling down into camp for the night after a long day's march, the ambulance wagons would start out once more on a long, weary search for men who were reported to have fallen by the way. At Osfontein they established a base-hospital, and when the column moved on they had 180 patients. Then they took possession of the farmhouse which Lord Roberts had occupied during his stay there, and turned that into sick wards. As opportunity offered, batches of sick men were conveyed in our wagons back to Kimberley, and carefully treated on the road. One of our men who happened to have been sent back with regular troops, under Royal Army Medical Corps supervision, was allowed to lie in the wagon four days without medical atten-

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tion, and he had a broken thigh. This, however, is an isolated case. I don't know of any other.

A good deal of needless fuss, too, was raised about this time by the sick men who were invalided down to Cape Town. Somebody wrote to the local papers complaining of the manner in which Australians were being treated at the Maitland Camp—that they were sadly in need of warm, decent clothing; that they were without money and unable to draw any pay, although expected to buy their own over-coats; that the food supplied was not sufficient to keep body and soul together; that invalids were compelled to sleep on the ground without blankets or waterproof sheets or over-coats; that men who had been ordered perfect rest by the doctors were made to do guard duty and fatigue work, and that when they were discharged from hospital they had to live on the charity of their friends. All this sounds very horrible and inconsiderate, but so far as I could ascertain it was rather a highly-coloured version of what actually took place. Unfortunately, among Australians, as well as other troops, there are those whose principal aim on a campaign of this sort is to remain at the base and have a good time. These are the men who write to the papers and complain on principle of their treatment. As a matter of fact, they had an Australian officer, Captain

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Bailey of Queensland, to complain to when things went wrong, and the Colonial governments had also deputed Mr J. W. Rail, Manager of the Australian National Mutual Life Association in Cape Town, to see that the sick and wounded men from Australia were properly cared for. The last-named gentleman had actually taken steps to provide better accommodation when these letters were made public, and huts were then being erected for them. The troops were also furnished with whatever sums of money were found necessary for their immediate wants. I don't think they were very badly treated at any time.



CHAPTER XI

REORGANISATION AND DISINTEGRATION

THE Guards Brigade taught us Australians a useful lesson at Bloemfontein. We, like the rest, marched into the Free State's pretty little capital—part of a proud, victorious army, but oh! so ragged and tattered, and half-starved and generally forlorn. We had patched and gathered, and gusseted and seamed—or whatever the cheerful tailor calls the process—the same suit of clothes that we had worn from the beginning of the campaign, and still we ran awful risks daily. Helmets were sodden and shapeless, while breeches or trousers, as the case might be, positively refused to hold together, despite the assistance of pieces of sacking. If only the perambulator girls of Chelsea could have seen those swagger Guardsmen as they actually were, and not as they are mercifully represented in pictures! And yet one couldn't help admiring them, even in their dilapidation. They limped into Bloemfontein, down at heel, foot-

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sore and dejected, with every ounce of life nearly marched out of them. In two days' time they had "bucked up" sufficiently to put quite a jump into their drill movements, and we stared in open-mouthed amazement as they paraded each morning in front of our hospital, with that peculiar clockwork jerk of automata. They were fine, manly, ragged fellows. See them change guard every day in front of Lord Roberts's quarters at the Presidency, and listen to the sharp word of command as the relieving guard comes to attention and grounds arms with a snap like the shutting of a penknife, every movement in perfect accord with the roll of the kettle-drums. And, whatever you do, observe that immaculate officer in front, as he throws out his long legs at an angle of forty-five degrees in unison with the beat of the bandmaster's baton. The sight was quite new to most of us—the perfectly-drilled, barrack-square soldier apparelled like our Australian "sundowner"—but a fine fellow every inch, in spite of rags and half rations. On one occasion I saw two men in the ranks collapse just as they halted and stood at ease in front of Headquarters—pure cases of underfeeding, overworking, and general break-up. We couldn't help admiring their gameness. What we failed to grasp was the fact that while they themselves were almost indecently clad about this time, their



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officers managed to turn out in the pink of military fashion immediately they got into town—spotless, immaculate tailors' dummies. I am afraid they were allowed more than their fair share of luggage along the line of march.

The Australians were little better off than the Guards in the matter of dress, and much worse off for quarters. They ploughed through mud and slush knee-deep to their camp; turned in at nights with puddles where the pillows usually are, and slept without any covering from the rain. But they "played the game" like all the rest. The most pitiable part of the whole performance was that the horses were not given anything like a decent show. Those of the Mounted Infantry had been shipped out on a transport vessel from Australia, wickedly crowded together both above and below deck; they were entrained at the ship's side without having had an opportunity of resting, and ever since had been over-ridden in badly-fitting saddles. They were stood out in the rain night after night, shivering with cold and underfed. In one regiment alone, 160 out of the crowd had the most horrible sore backs one cares to look at—all due to the fact that the saddles had not been properly fitted and padded before the men left Sydney. One company had saved exactly sixteen out of the original 120 or 130 mounts.

But all this was now to be changed. In-

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stead of remaining irresponsible, scattered units, without influence enough to get proper equipment, the whole of the Australian and Canadian Mounted Infantry were now to be concentrated under one command—that of Major-General Hutton, who had just come over from Kimberley. We knew this officer well. For years he had been Commandant of the N.S.W. Defence Forces, and later had been at the head of the Canadian Militia. Before his appearance on the scene at Bloemfontein there had been some talk of an Australian Brigade, but it had not amounted to much, largely because of the intercolonial jealousies among our officers—jealousies which were not quite appreciated at Headquarters, and certainly not encouraged. Everyone who had never been to Australia took it for granted that we were all knit in the bonds of brotherly love and comradeship. But General Hutton knew us and some of our queer little habits of quarrelling from opposite sides of artificial intercolonial boundaries. He had made many friends in New South Wales, and some enemies, but we were all satisfied that under the new order of things we should get a better chance both in the fighting and in the matter of equipment.

He was authorised to collect and take command of a Brigade consisting of all the Australian and Canadian Mounted Infantry,

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together with a slight admixture of Imperial troops drawn from the same branch of the service. General Ridley was to organise the Second Brigade, comprising most of the South African Colonials, with the same flavour of regular Mounted Infantry. The whole was to be commanded by General Ian Hamilton. Each Brigade was to consist of four Corps, all under Imperial commands. Colonel Alderson was placed in charge of the First Corps of Hutton's Brigade, which consisted of the 1st Battalion Imperial Mounted Infantry, 1st and 2nd Battalions Canadian Mounted Rifles, and Strathcona's Horse, with a total paper strength of 1730. The Second Corps was commanded by Colonel De Lisle, of the Durham Light Infantry, who had under him the 6th Mounted Infantry, N.S.W. Mounted Rifles under Colonel Knight, and the West Australian Mounted Infantry under Major Moor—total strength, 1200. Colonel Pilcher was given the Third Corps—3rd Mounted Infantry, Queensland Mounted Infantry under Colonel Ricardo, and New Zealand Mounted Infantry under Major Robin, totalling 1440. The Fourth Corps was placed under Colonel Henry; it comprised the 4th Mounted Infantry, the Victorian Mounted Infantry under Colonel Price, the South Australian Mounted Infantry under Captain Reade, and the Tasmanian Mounted Infantry

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under Major Cameron, or a total of 1320.

The Brigade troops also included a company of Engineers under Colonel Parrott, of New South Wales, and a complete Hospital section furnished by the N.S.W. Army Medical Corps under Colonel Williams, who was appointed Divisional P.M.O. Colonel Hoad, of Victoria, acted as A.A.G. to General Hutton, and Colonel Gordon, Commandant of South Australian forces, was appointed as D.A.G. for lines of communication.

The badge designed for the new Brigade was a large "A," sewn on to the left side of the helmet, the different corps being distinguished by patches of colour in the angle of the letter. Very few of the Australians by this time had retained their old slouch hats—only the Army Medical Corps people, as far as I remember. The Australian Horse wore helmets, with a myrtle green cross as a distinguishing badge—their regimental colour. The Lancers wore nothing by which you could pick them out from "regular" troops. The Artillery—well, it was so long since anyone remembered having seen them, that we were uncertain what they wore. In all probability it was the regulation helmet.

General Hutton, as I said, was authorised to collect all the Australian Mounted Infantry together. Do you know how long it takes to

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do a small job like this on active service in a country like South Africa? It is never done completely. Squadrons, and even regiments, are sent out to forage for horses, or strengthen detachments which are going on some particular errand—hundreds of things happen in a week to necessitate sudden moves, and the first men to hand are collared. Commands are split up every day, and the fragments get lost or absorbed by other Generals, who don't release them willingly. Very often men never see their own Brigadier from start to finish of the campaign. It is a wise man who knows his own Commanding Officer. The same sort of thing happened with us. Never were the whole of the Australian Mounted Infantry brought together. Either the Victorians were away or some of the N.S.W. men, and these had no sooner returned than the New Zealanders were sent off "on their own." So it went on from month to month. Probably one-fifth of the new Brigade never saw or came under the direct control of their new Brigadier. As far as the major portion of the Second Corps was concerned, we stuck to Hutton from Bloemfontein to Kroonstadt, and then went over to General Hamilton for the rest of the campaign, or until he broke his shoulder-blade at Heidelberg and deputed his command to General Hunter. I don't suppose that "E" Squadron of the N.S.W. Mounted In-

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fantry ever saw General Hutton in South Africa. While the Brigade was being formed, Captain Holmes was away in the interior looking for remounts, and he had hardly got back when he was sent off with 100 men towards Thabanchu. His squadron was lost to us until the date of our arrival at Kroonstadt. Packing up at an hour's notice, he started out of camp, just beyond Bloemfontein, with three days' rations and 110 men, on April 28th —two days before the rest of the Brigade moved north. At the Thaba Mountain fight the squadron, acting as advance guard to Colonel de Lisle's Corps, first came under fire. Lieutenant Dove and twenty-five men were despatched to watch a Kaffir hut, while Captain Holmes and the rest were ordered to seize a small kopje to the north-east, which was actually the key to the whole position. Holmes, with his men, crept up under heavy fire to an intervening ridge and tried to push on to the next, but the hail of bullets became so thick that he was obliged to withdraw. He, however, set to work to reach the position by some other route. Finding that in any case he would have to cross an open patch of veldt which offered little or no cover, he decided to gallop his squadron across in groups of four, with 100 yards' interval between each man. By this means he gained the hill he wanted, and once there he was

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able to worry the Boer gunners tremendously, while he and his men were practically under safe cover. They watched for every flash from the guns: then ducked. Whiz—bang went the shell harmlessly over their heads, and up they came with well-directed volleys at the spot from whence the flash had issued. The Boers, on this occasion, were using black powder for their guns, so that the position was easily located, and so irritating must our fire have become, that twice or thrice they limbered up and opened fire from fresh positions. Then they turned a pom-pom on to us, and burst shrapnel over our heads, but we had plenty of cover, and no one was touched. This went on from ten o'clock in the morning until dusk, when Holmes was ordered to retire. He sneaked his men out one by one, just as he had got them in, without casualty, but he was left without orders, and bivouacked his squadron just out of range. They were without food, *or* water, *or* blankets, and without orders.

At daylight next morning they were in exactly the same predicament—still no food or water or blankets or orders. Do you know what the average Imperial officer would have done under such circumstances? Ninety-nine out of every hundred would have stuck where they were until ordered to move. But Holmes knew, by a sort of instinct, that the

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kopje which he had occupied the previous day was still the key of the situation, and after sending an orderly to find Colonel de Lisle, with a report of his intention, he proceeded to worm his way back to it, just as he had done twenty-four hours ago. There he remained until midday, when he received an order to withdraw; he got his men back across the open veldt one by one—again in groups of four. He himself led the way with the first group—one horse shot dead. In the second group Private F. V. Smith was shot through the spine, and in the succeeding batch three other privates were wounded, but not seriously. Two men were missing. Cradock's horse had been shot in the scramble back, and he started to run through a mealie patch, but did not reach his comrades. Owen's horse got away from him, and he did not come into camp for some time. After this the squadron was given half an hour's rest at the nearest water-hole—it had gone hungry and thirsty since breakfast-time the previous morning. The Corps Commander complimented the men on their work, and mentioned the officers in despatches.

At Ventersburg, on May 10th, "E" Squadron, N.S.W. Mounted Infantry—the squadron, by the way, which had been sent out as infantry—was again to the front, acting as advance guard to cavalry. Nearing Ventersburg they

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overhauled a Boer convoy in difficulties. The mules and bullocks had knocked up, and some wagons were being dragged along by hand. Captain Holmes at once sent back a message explaining the situation, and waited impatiently for the cavalry and guns to come up. But they were hopelessly in rear, as was their usual wont, and after a period of exasperating delay he decided to rush in on his own account. It was a somewhat risky experiment, but fortunately they were on top of the Boer convoy before the escort knew it. Lieutenant Dove galloped in on the left and Lieutenant Harriot on the right, while Captain Holmes, with the rest of the squadron, took the centre. In this formation they swooped down upon the wagons and called upon the drivers to surrender. Holmes was quite unarmed—he carried a sjambok and nothing more deadly—but two men threw down their guns without noticing this fact. A third followed suit, but the next man calmly inserted a clip of cartridges in his rifle and prepared to shoot. At this critical juncture Holmes was about 100 yards ahead of his men, but they took in the situation at a glance, and as the Boer dropped on his knee to fire Private Williams did the same. This had the effect of withdrawing attention from Holmes: as a matter of fact, Williams got the bullet in the side of his neck before

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he could get his shot in, and while dismounted his horse had wandered away. Private Hoffman, however, rode up with his own horse to Williams's assistance, and Corporal Chant, with some others, supported; but in the general *mélée* which followed, Chant received a wound in his left shoulder. The West Australians then galloped up, and with the N.S.W. men overtook the convoy once more, capturing seventeen prisoners and several wagons, which, together with three Boer ambulances, containing sixteen wounded, were in hopeless difficulties. Of the seventeen prisoners Holmes's men took at least twelve. What could have been done if the cavalry and artillery had come up a little more promptly?

But our cavalry, too often, are ridiculously overweighted — hung about like Christmas trees. Observe that horseguardsman on the opposite page. His own *avordupois*, added to the gear which is visible—to say nothing of what lurks on the near side of his horse—will tot up to something like twenty stone. Can you imagine this “charger” doing a wild gallop at the end of a long day’s march?



Drawn by Norman H. Hardy

Sketch by Frank Wilkinsey

HORSEGUARDSMAN—ON SERVICE



1



CHAPTER XII

ON DE WET'S TRAIL

OUR first formal introduction to Christian De Wet took place, strange to say, very near to De Wetsdorp. We talked with him—at long range—nearly the whole of Sunday, April 22nd, at Leeuwberg, but he disappeared at night without remembering to leave his address, and although we occasionally caught sight of him in the distance he seemed too busy to stop and speak, and it was not until May 7th that we met again face to face. On this occasion, too, he was on the north side of the Zand River: we were on the south, and there was only a crippled railway bridge in between. It seemed quite too absurd, even so far back as April, that we should have missed him on the road all the way up through Ladybrand and the eastern portion of the Free State, for we were always on the lookout for him, but we didn't know Christian De Wet then as we do now. We have since come to the conclusion that he



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avoided us intentionally, just in the same way and for much the same reason that a fellow often dodges the bailiff in the street—he couldn't pay, and he objected to a *ca re*. We have been trying to serve that summons on him for quite a long time now. That little "enveloping" movement at Leeuwberg has been repeated, with but slight variations, *ad nauseam*. We learnt to know it by heart. Sometimes it was called a "reconnaissance in force," just to vary the monotony, in which case the official report would set out that after forming a cordon round the enemy, and engaging him all day, the troops retired, "the object of the reconnaissance having been accomplished: our casualties were," etc., etc. Always the same story: the enveloping movement which did not envelop: the cordon which only reached round three sides, leaving the fourth—the obvious line of retreat—open.

Never did a more slippery customer take us on at this particular game. We "surround" him so effectually that if he attempts to retire in any given direction he will assuredly bump up against General Blank's division; or run into Colonel Smith-Jones's arms; or he will strike an ugly snag in the shape of Brown-Robinson's Cavalry or Brace-girdle's Horse, or somebody else's Mounted Infantry Brigade. We tighten the cordon

On De Wet's Trail

until—on paper—he has not a kopje left to fall back upon. Any duly-accredited war expert will tell you that this time, at any-rate, we are bound to capture the whole outfit. It will be another Paardeberg, with De Wet instead of Cronje the chief mourner. We picture to ourselves the manner of the surrender, and gamble on the number of prisoners. We decide upon exactly what we want out of their laager to make up deficiencies in our kits, when suddenly, like the conjurer's coin, obedient to the wave of the magic wand, the gentle Boer vanishes from the stage and bobs up serenely in the far corner of the hall among the audience. The quickness of the Dutch hand—or rather horse—deceives the British eye.

On the day I have mentioned a Boer force, 5000 strong, under Christian De Wet, was reported twenty miles south-east of Bloemfontein, on the main road to De Wetsdorp. Brabant's Horse at this time were down at Wepener on the Basutoland border; Chermside's Division was somewhere over to the south-west; Rundle was coming up from Aliwal North with the Eighth Division; Colville was away in the direction of Thabanchu; while French's Cavalry Division, the Guards Brigade under Pole-Carew, and the First Corps of the Mounted Infantry Division—just formed—under Colonel Alderson, started out

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from Bloemfontein to prevent De Wet coming north. Altogether there did not appear to be the slightest possible loophole of escape for him, until he showed us how it could be done. Leeuwkop dominates a series of hills running south in the direction of De Wetsdorp, through most difficult fighting country. The Bloemfontein force attacked this position on the north, south and west. Colonel Alderson's Corps was on the right, then the Guards Brigade and the Cavalry. Colonel Alderson moved slowly round the base of the first ridge, pulling up just outside shelling range. Skirmishing parties of Canadian Mounted Infantry were pushed forward towards Leeuwkop, and retired when fired upon. The position was occupied. The brigade, in close order, thereupon moved up to within 2000 yards, offering a splendid target for gun practice. But the Boers were not to be caught with chaff. They didn't show their hand. For half an hour we remained huddled up together—Canadians, Roberts's Horse, Imperial Mounted Infantry and Royal Artillery, with two pom-poms and four galloping Maxims. We had nothing heavier than a pom-pom, so that we were evidently not intended to do the attacking.

In the distance, away to our left, we saw French's guns pounding away at the kopje with common shell and shrapnel, but still

On De Wet's Trail

there was no reply, and still we remained in a solid mass—ambulance wagons and ammunition wagons in the general lump—a most tempting bait. To our right lay a large farmhouse flying the white flag. It looked quite safe at the time, but immediately the Canadian Mounted Infantry approached, two or three of their number were rolled out of their saddles by rifle shots from behind the stone walls.

But still no sign of life from the kopje over against us.

At last it came, and with no uncertain sound. It came screeching over our heads, with a rush and a tear and then a bang!—100 yards in rear of the column. Others followed in rapid succession, and then we slowly gathered ourselves together, turned fours about and limbered to the rear, still in close order. We picked up some of the pieces of shell. They had been firing at us with our own ammunition from some of our own guns—probably those captured at Sanna's Post a week or so previously! For an hour or so we remained idle, just outside shell range, and then a battery of Royal Artillery 12-pounders came to our assistance. They opened a brisk fire on the kopje, but nobody on our side saw a single shell take effect, and there was no reply.

A colonel of the Guards wanted badly to

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be allowed to rush the position with his regiment, but the poor chaps didn't appear to have a trot left in them. They had been under arms since five o'clock that morning—twelve hours—and marching most of the time, on a biscuit or two each. Even when they reached the end of their march they were manœuvred about from one place to another quite unnecessarily, and finally, just to make things comfortable, they were set at trench-digging with bayonet points.

Then De Wet, having kept us at bay the whole day, quietly abandoned his position, and trotted off south under our noses. We couldn't reach him with our pop-guns, and we hadn't been able to get across his line of retreat. So we bivouacked where chance left us when darkness fell and started off in pursuit next morning: so it went on from day to day. We chased them from point to point, occasionally dropping on their rear-guard and losing them in the dark. On Wednesday skirmishing took place at Paarde Kraal, when the 9th Lancers and 14th Hussars lost two killed and forty wounded. We pushed on to Rietpoort, leaving the Guards Brigade in rear, but at this point we learnt by heliograph that De Wet had cleared away to the east and that Rundle was on his track. It was not, therefore, necessary for the Mounted Infantry to go further. The Guards were



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posted off across country to Thabanchu to cut De Wet off there. French went out to Paulsmihsberg, a little to the west, and Colonel Alderson joined him there. The whole "show" was burst up for this time at anyrate—barring the demolition of that farmhouse from which the Canadians had been "potted."

This little incident, fitted with fresh names and places, will stand good as a description of six months' operations against that slippery Free State commandant. We have been labouring in his wake, heavily handicapped with tons upon tons of superfluous baggage and regiments of weary foot-soldiers, from point to point and never catching him—a London bus trying to wear down a nimble cyclist—our Artillery ever bringing up our rear, and never dreaming of occupying positions with their guns which De Wet would have picked without the slightest hesitation. I have seen him withdraw a 15-pounder from a spot apparently so inaccessible that no British Artillery officer would look at it without a shudder. Moreover, De Wet would often dodge about with a single gun and let us have the benefit of it from two or three distinct positions while we were manœuvring a battery into action. Why, by the way, do we still hesitate to separate the half dozen guns in a battery? The lessons we have

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learnt as to the value of individual rifle fire in this class of warfare do not appear to have been applied to artillery, for some reason or other.

Then, again, it must be remembered that while the enemy is picking his own line of country we are following a trail which has been practically denuded of forage and stores, and is inhabited by a race of people whose sympathies are not by any means with us. Every farmer on the road was an Intelligence Officer for them, while our Intelligence Department, up to very recently, was run by Imperial officers, who were mere children in the hands of this cunning race of people. I am perfectly satisfied that whereas De Wet knew our every movement beforehand, we never had the slightest inkling of what he was going to do. Latterly the Intelligence work of each column has been placed in the hands of South African and Australian officers, who are far better fitted for it, but the change comes somewhat tardily to be of much use. How long, it has frequently been asked, would De Wet have remained at large if the South African Colonials, the Canadian Mounted Infantry and all the Australians, including the Bushmen, had been let loose on his track?

CHAPTER XIII

KAREE AND—AFTERWARDS

IT is still no easy matter to keep in touch with the various Australian units at the front, the formation of the new Mounted Infantry Brigade notwithstanding. So far as I can remember, "E" squadron of N.S.W. Mounted Infantry is down in the neighbourhood of Thabanchu. The Lancers and Australian Horse still remain attached to General French's command, and the Artillery are still somewhere in Griqualand. Major-General Hutton has collected nearly all the Victorians, South Australians, New Zealanders and West Australians in camp at Rustfontein, just outside Bloemfontein, but still there are vacant spaces for the Queenslanders and the N.S.W. Regiment. The former are suddenly sent out to the Waterworks, due east, and the latter have never yet been brought into camp. They have bivouacked out in the wet for the last fortnight or three weeks, at a little place called Karee, half way between Bloemfontein and Brandfoot. On reference to my diary I

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find that we settled down here on March 30th, after twelve hours of hard fighting, and remained practically in the same position until the end of April. Half the regiment was dismounted—no horses available—and the other half rode animals that really ought to have been on the sick list. But “orders is orders,” and we had to turn out as best we could. On the morning of the 29th we stood facing a huge table-topped kopje, supposed to be held in force by the enemy. General French had gone round to the left to operate on the Boers’ probable line of retreat. Tucker, with the 14th and 15th Infantry Brigades, was to attack in the centre, and Colonel Le Gallais, then in charge of mounted infantry, on the right. With us were also the 6th and 8th Mounted Infantry, Kitchener’s and Nesbitt’s Horse, the C.I.V. Mounted Regiment, and three pom-poms. The N.S.W. Medical Corps sent out three ambulances, a bearer section under Captain Roth, and two carts with mounted bearer section under Captain T. Marshall.

The Mounted Brigade disposition, as we moved forward to attack, was as follows:—Kitchener’s Horse and the C.I.V.’s to the extreme left, then the 6th and 8th Mounted Infantry, with N.S.W. Mounted Infantry and Nesbitt’s Horse on the right. The first objective was a long, low line of kopjes sloping gradually



Karee and—Afterwards

and gently towards us. We moved up by troops in widely-extended formation, but drew a blank. Skirting round the foot of the hill the N.S.W. troops scouted the next likely position, a couple of miles ahead. This was occupied, but not strongly. Some of Nesbitt's Horse rode up to within 500 yards, when the Boers opened a brisk fire and compelled them to retreat. The Australians were then dismounted and sent forward to the crest of the hill. They crept cautiously up, under cover of the bushes, and pushed the Boer scouts back on the main body, which had taken up a strong position about 1500 yards behind. Against the skyline we could see men flitting about airily from trench to trench, some on horseback, others on foot. The number actually engaged against us has been variously estimated at from 2000 to 5000—probably it would be about half way between. Anyhow we exchanged shots at long range, and for a quarter of an hour or so listened to their bullets whisking by overhead. We sat tight under cover without giving them unnecessary provocation, but they kept a keen lookout for any stray heads that might appear above the low scrub which covered the hill side.

We had ceased firing altogether and were stretched comfortably out on the veldt, taking a rest, when suddenly from the left of the

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Boer position there emerged a body of horsemen who made straight for us. They dismounted and left their horses to graze, in charge of half a dozen of their number, and came on firing at us with old-fashioned black-powder cartridges. They had absolutely no cover; they were on the open, but widely distributed with irregular intervals between each. Now they were racing for the kopje on which the N.S.W. Regiment lay *perdu*; apparently they imagined, from the fact that we had ceased fire for the last quarter of an hour, that we had retired. On and on they came, kneeling to fire every fifty or sixty yards, and then rushing forward. This was the opportunity for which our new pom-pom battery had been yearning, and they took it. Skirting round the base of the kopje they brought their gun into action so nimbly that, before the Boers knew what was going to happen, a string of pound shells dropped right among them.

"Pom—pom—pom—pom"—it thundered out once more, like the huge stampers in a quartz-crushing battery, and again little clouds of dust over yonder told their tale. But the first round was quite enough for Brother Boer. He was in full cry for cover now, and we pounded him unmercifully in the rear, until he got out of range. This was about the first time his own pet type of gun



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had been used against him in the campaign, and he didn't care about facing such music any more than our fellows. The pom-pom has a wonderful dissolving effect.

After half an hour's desultory firing Colonel le Gallais decided to push the attack home. Nesbitt's Horse deployed to the left and moved forward across the open, while the N.S.W. Mounted Infantry took the extreme right. The leading squadrons were well within rifle range when we noticed shells—not of our firing—bursting over the Boer trenches. Apparently General French, from his position in rear, had found their range. Anyhow, it was not safe for us to push on further at that stage, especially as the enemy's rifle fire was more "frequent and free" than seemed good for us. Nesbitt's men retired at a gentle canter, still keeping their extension, and still under heavy fire, until suddenly a Boer shell went screeching in their direction, and burst a dozen yards astern of the hindermost man. This was their habit—they generally reserved pleasant little surprises like this until the tail-end of the day's fighting. Nesbitt's men broke into a gallop and got out of range without casualty, while our pom-poms covered their retreat.

The N.S.W. Regiment made a wide sweep of about four miles to the right of the position and halted. This was about five o'clock in the



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evening, and the Boers were still making a game fight of it. Dismounting, we left the horses under the brow of a hill and prepared to rush, but the enemy had apparently divined our little scheme. They dropped shell after shell, with excellent judgment, right among our led horses, but we had tremendous luck. One man in "A" Squadron had his haversack torn from his side by a bit of flying shell, but nothing more serious happened. In the meantime, the pom-poms to our left front were pounding away at the Boer trenches, until the occupants, unable to hold their position, prepared to withdraw. This was our chance. Every man stood to his horse ready. The order was given—"gallop"—and away we went over the ridge and across the plain beneath—first the 6th and 8th Mounted Infantry, then the N.S.W. men with "A" Squadron in the lead and a pom-pom rattling over the stones in rear. It was drawn by six horses and well driven, but the country was too rough and ragged for such a break-neck race, and finally it bumped quite clear of the ground, landing on its side. Bump, bump, bump—surely it would be smashed into little pieces! The drivers took a pull on the horses, but before they steadied the team the gun carriage had righted itself by another series of erratic bounds. It was not of any further use to us that day.



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In the meantime the Mounted Infantry reached the foot of the far hill and dismounted. They stormed up the side to a running accompaniment of parting shots from the Boers, and reached the summit just in time to see the enemy in full retreat towards Brandfort, their gun galloping madly in rear. It was too late and too dark to follow, and for the same reason inadvisable to leave the position just gained, so we bivouacked just where we stood and slept round our camp fires. We had been in the saddle continuously since seven o'clock that morning.

From the point of view of the N.S.W. Lancers and the Australian Horse, who were with French's column, this was one of the hottest engagements yet fought. It came on the top of a long weary march from Bloemfontein and a long fast of thirty hours. Their transport wagons had stuck in the drift at The Glen. Early in the day the Australian Horse, while pushed a little ahead of the column, were allowed to creep up quite close to the Boer lines, and suddenly a shell landed on the leading troop. A struggling heap of men and horses—Trooper W. P. Bonner was quite dead, and four others slightly wounded. Trooper T. Bonner, riding alongside his brother, was unhurt. Then they extended and raced at a gallop for the foot of the kopje, climbing it on foot, carbines in hand. From here they

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kept up a brisk fusilade on the retreating Boers, and peppered them as they ran. Finally they remounted under heavy shell fire, and themselves retired as the infantry came up. There were heavy casualties that day, principally among the Scottish Borderers.

The following morning, by daylight, the Mounted Infantry were standing to their horses awaiting orders, but none reached us. The Boers were on the kopjes between us and Brandfort, but they had left many of their wounded in farmhouses close to our camp. We found a German doctor at one, in charge of four bad cases—a fifth man had died in the night and was already sewn up in a white sheet. The doctor had neither splints nor surgical instruments of any kind with which to set the broken limbs. He was expecting a Boer ambulance to come along every minute, and we promised him a safe escort out of our lines. Then we took bearings of the country round about us, and settled down into camp to wait for our wagons.

In this locality we remained for weeks—weeks of unremitting toil in the worst of weather, and without tents. We lived in trenches most of the time and were sniped at almost every day in the week. Let me quote a few more extracts from that Sergeant's diary :—

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"March 31st.—Scouted to front and collected cattle; got about 3000 sheep, 1500 cattle and a few horses. Moved camp two or three miles further south.

"April 1st to 5th.—Camped at Spytfontein Farm; plenty of duty. Day and night patrols; day and night outposts; every other night out of bed; *reveille* 4.30 a.m.; stand to arms till sunrise.

"April 6th.—Sharp skirmish with enemy's patrols at daybreak; Corporal Allan severely wounded in chest; one horse shot. Alarms and surprises all day and night.

"April 7th.—Turned out at 2 a.m. by outpost firing on cattle; great commotion. More excitement at night; all hands in trenches; patrols flying right and left.

"April 8th.—Still at Spytfontein. Half available men on duty day and night; work very heavy. Sickness on increase; 115 privates on duty out of 187. About 7 a.m. few shots heard from east; orderlies started off, trenches were manned, horses saddled up wagons inspanned; officers, men, sick horses, transport, all sorts and conditions, moved westerly. Breastworks had previously been prepared, trenches dug, entanglements put up and position made next door to impregnable. We were 310 strong, with 8th Mounted Infantry on our right and others in rear. It was afterwards ascertained that about 300

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of enemy had approached closer than usual to our position. Camp was moved for sanitary reasons.

“April 15th and 16th.—Camp quiet; work still heavy.

“April 17th.—Very wet; no tents. Men suffering much; clothes and boots in very bad way.”

And so on, for some considerable period—all the time, in fact, that the army was supposed to be “resting” at Bloemfontein.

Our sick were lying about on the bare ground, in the wet, for days, until they could be carted into town. Our clothes were hanging in shreds, and altogether we were having a fairly good dose of the dark side of campaigning.



Drawn by Norman H. Hardy

Sketch by Frank Willinam

"D——N"

"Australia at the Front"

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CHAPTER XIV

VET RIVER

THE only occasion within my recollection on which the First Brigade of Mounted Infantry —*i.e.*, the Australians—operated together in anything like a big fight was at Vet River on May 5th. Major-General Hutton then had the Second Corps under his command, as well as the First, Third and Fourth. Leaving Bloemfontein on May 1st, the Brigade, keeping on the left flank of the main column, moved out east of Karee, then pushed a little to the north, as far as Brackpan, or Saltpan, a huge inland sea fringed with Lombardy pines. We stopped here a few hours and then made a bee-line for Brandfort. The N.S.W. Field Hospital under Major Fiaschi and Lieutenant Dick, together with a Mounted Bearer Company under Major Eames and Lieutenant Edwards, following on behind, got word of the change of route and cut across country to meet the Brigade ; but Colonel Parrott, who was coming along with his party of Engineers and implements for bridge and railway repairs, spent

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a couple of nights on the bare veldt looking for us. You don't know quite what this means. You go on following roads which lead to nowhere—except on our Intelligence maps—then take short cuts in sheer desperation, and find yourself overtaken by darkness miles away from water. It isn't safe to show yourself near a strange farmhouse unless you are prepared for emergencies ; and if you are away from farmhouses you are generally away from water-holes.

We entered Brandfort without much resistance from the Boers. They kept us in check until the last of their wagons had got clear of the town, and then retired. The Head-quarter camp moved up from Bloemfontein by rail : the Guards kept to the east of the railway line on the way up, and with several batteries of artillery camped round the township. The N.S.W. Mounted Rifles passed through without stopping and camped seven miles further north. From here we moved forward again next morning, still on the left flank of the main advance. About ten o'clock we sighted Vet River, or rather that long belt of trees which marks the bed of the river. Some Boer scouts came into our lines and gave themselves up. One was a Scotchman, who seemed delighted at having escaped. He told us that several of them, who had been patrolling in rear of the Boer convoy,



Vet River

had met our scouts, and that one of their number had ridden in to report the circumstance. Immediately his back was turned the rest galloped straight for our lines and surrendered their arms. They told us that Boers to the number of 900 were entrenched in the river bed, but that they had no guns. As a matter of fact they were not 900 strong, but they had one long-range gun and several pom-poms. Of course we had to find this out for ourselves, and it took most of the day to do it.

The Boer position extended for about a couple of miles along the river bed, with the drift, which we should have eventually to cross to go north, in the centre. Behind them lay a long range of kopjes, which afforded excellent cover for wagons and led horses. Between us and the river, sloping down by gentle undulations, lay a couple of miles of open veldt, broken only by a group of Kaffir kraals, sheltered on one side by a small razor-back ridge. This was the key of our position. Directly opposite it stood an old farmhouse just to the right of the road leading down to the drift. The house was occupied by Boer snipers. We opened proceedings with a few rounds from the pom-pom and galloping Colts on the left, where the Canadians were posted. The N.S.W. Mounted Infantry were supporting the Canadians. We had no heavy

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guns on our side to touch what appeared to be their main position: the Canadian officers clamoured to be allowed to advance their Colts within range and rake the river bed, but Colonel Alderson had other things in view. Thus we had the aggravation of seeing scores upon scores of the enemy trooping down the far hill sides into the river bed to join their comrades. They rode down in little groups or singly, just as the fit took them, and just in the same leisurely fashion as they ride off in the middle of an engagement, just when they think they have had enough fighting for one day.

At last some big guns on our right came into action and commenced landing shells in the middle of the road down which the Boers were pouring. The very first split up a party of ten or twelve and sent one horse with his rider sprawling in the dust. The man got up and ran, but his horse never moved again. Then the shells began to drop round about the farmhouse, and as the dust cleared away after each explosion you could see parties of riflemen on foot racing for the cover afforded by the river bed depression. All this time they maintained an ominous silence. Hutton then sent down two squadrons of Canadian Mounted Rifles to "draw" them. They went off at a canter, dismounted half way down the incline, and skirmished ahead on

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foot, while their horses stood snugly ensconced in a field of mealies. Even then nothing happened. The Canadians had instructions not to rush the position, and the Boers were evidently reserving their fire for closer quarters.

Now came the turn of the N.S.W. Mounted Rifles. We lost sight of the Canadians for the rest of the day. Our task was to ride down to the Kaffir kraal to the right front, dismount and rush the position at the point of the bayonet. On this particular occasion the ordinary position of the squadrons was reversed. "D" was away doing convoy work; "C" was in advance of "B" and "A" came on in support of "B." Captain Hilliard, therefore, led the leading squadron. He took his men coolly down the slope to the kraal, while "B" Squadron, under Captain Lenehan, followed a few hundred yards behind, and finally "A" Squadron under Lieutenant M'Lean. Colonel Knight and Captain Antill also charged down with the regiment. At the kraal every third man was left in charge of the horses, and just at this stage we were forcibly given to understand that br'er Boer was not altogether without artillery. His big gun opened on our led horses, bunched up near the kraal, the first shell landing 100 yards or so in rear; the second, third and fourth plunked into them, knocking three or four over, but the men, with their proverbial luck, escaped with-

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out damage. They merely tucked the horses a little closer under the ridge and sat tight; after this the shells flew overhead quite harmlessly. The Boer gunners couldn't get under the crest of the hill.

In the meantime Captain Hilliard, with "C" Squadron at his heels, made a dash on foot half way down the slope. His men were extended to intervals of over 100 yards, and took advantage of the long grass to hide their movements. But the manœuvre had been seen from the river bed. A heavy fusilade was opened all along the line. Bullets "jipped" into the grass among our men like hailstones at the oncoming of a storm. By a series of short dashes they gradually decreased the distance between themselves and the enemy, and at each halt they lay prone to recover breath and return fire. At a little distance it seemed certain that half the attacking squadrons would be hit before reaching the river, but here again our phenomenal luck stood to us. We lay on the ground gathering wind for a final dash under a perfect hail of bullets, but not a man was struck. Then, on the order to charge, every bayonet was fixed, and every man, with a sudden spring and a wild "hooray," went straight for his quarry at the double, "C" Squadron rushing in on the left, "B" on the centre and "A" on the right.



Vet River

The glint of cold steel was quite enough. As we came on with this irresistible rush the enemy retired in confusion up the opposite bank. Our men were not to be denied. They waded waist deep across the river bed and scrambled up the other side like a lot of ants, firing as they went. But they had gone quite far enough without supports. Here they were met with an enfilading fire from the left and a Maxim blazed away at them from the right. Lieutenant Newman's troop—"C" Squadron —made a dash for the Maxim, which the Boers abandoned on his approach. Some New Zealanders who had pushed forward on the right were in at the capture, and I believe there has been some dispute as to ownership, but the award went to Lieutenant Newman to the best of my recollection.

After this there was nothing left for the N.S.W. troops but to hold the ground which they had won so gallantly, and wait for reinforcements. As evening closed in our heavy guns on the right made some very pretty shooting on the retiring Boer force, and the column was able to cross the drift before camping that night. An hour or so after settling down Lord Roberts had the following message heliographed to Major-General Hutton :—

"My hearty congratulations to the Mounted Infantry on their excellent day's work."

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Major-General Hutton, in writing to the Premier of New South Wales a few days subsequently, says :—

“The battalion (meaning the N. S. W. Mounted Rifles) had already won a great name for itself, but it is safe to say that it has still more enhanced its reputation, and that of the corps which it represents, during the recent operations. We have been continually in action from the 3rd to the 12th, both days inclusive, and the lion’s share of the fighting has fallen to the lot of my comrades from New South Wales. At Wetzee’s Drift, on the 5th, I set them straight at the enemy, still stubbornly holding on to the bank of the Vet. They were not to be denied, and after a temporary pause they went straight at the enemy, turned him out and then followed him helter skelter to his next position in a deep spruit, from which they also turned him. It would be invidious to discriminate, but Captain Hilliard’s company had the good fortune of being in a position to lead the attack, followed by Captain (now Major) Antill’s. Of the individual men I would not venture to say that one was better than the other, since all vied with one another as to who should be first to close upon the enemy and use the bayonet. This action was a very important

Vet River

one, as by its success the whole Boer position in the Vet River was turned and the enemy had no other resource than to beat a hasty retreat. The cheerfulness with which your N.S.W. Riflemen take and have taken to all the hardships and discomforts of the campaign makes me proud of having been associated with them as their General in the past, and of being their General-Commanding in the present. It gives me great pleasure to offer you and your Government my hearty congratulations on being represented by such fine soldiers. I cannot close this without a special reference to the N.S.W. Army Medical Corps. Their praises are in everybody's mouth, and I am told that every sick and wounded soldier, of whatever branch of the service, hopes that Providence may place him under the care of the N.S.W. Ambulance. It is the result of Colonel Williams's organisation and care during many years past. The present Principal Medical Officer is Major Fiaschi, as Colonel Williams is in the proud position of being Principal Medical Officer to the whole Mounted Infantry Division of 11,000 men. A higher compliment he could not be paid."

The illustration which accompanies this chapter is from an actual sketch on the spot while the N.S.W. Mounted Rifles were opening



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out to the attack. It is absolutely correct both topographically and perspectively, but it gives *no* idea of what actually took place; on the contrary it gives an idea of the utter impossibility of conveying the "real thing" on paper this size, if one is to stick to actual facts. If it had been done in Fleet Street for an illustrated paper you would, of course, have had your men grouped together most picturesquely, with shells bursting around them and a series of little puffs of smoke in the distance to show where the enemy was firing from. In the "real thing" your men are scattered at 100-yard intervals over a couple of miles of country—not bunched up. In the "real thing" you have no smoke—nothing to show where the other side is shooting from—and your own men are so near the tone of the veldt that the figures are barely distinguishable from it at a little distance. I have had this sketch inserted principally with the idea of conveying some idea of the unpicturesqueness of modern fights. If it were not for the uniforms on the men in the foreground it might just as well stand for a pheasant drive. Anyhow, it has the questionable advantage of being *truthful*.



Drawn by Norman H. Hardy

'Australia at the Front'

NEW SOUTH WALES AT VET RIVER

Sketch by Frank Williamson

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CHAPTER XV

A SMALL COMEDY

[SCENE.—*Smaldeel, O.F.S. Time about 10.30 a.m. May 6th.*]

Troops are entering the town; residents are emerging from their houses.

STOREKEEPER (British). Good morning, gentlemen, good morning. By Jove, I'm awfully glad to see you all; it does my heart good to have British faces round me once more. Won't you get off and join me in something? Yes, tie your horses to the stoep railings, they'll be quite safe there. Well, well, for eight months I've been praying for this day and it has come at last. What will you take, sir? I can recommend this brand. Say when. And you, sir? Oh, have a decent nip. My word, I have had a time of it recently. The Boers practically cleaned me out before they left: took about thirty cases of whisky, all the brandy, cigars

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and tobacco — bundled it all into the train last night and scooted for dear life. But that doesn't trouble me much now. All's well that ends well. I'm only sorry that I can't supply the whole of your army with whisky. Here's your health, sir, and right welcome you are. Thank you, the same to you. The Provost-Marshal has closed up my store ; won't let me sell the troops anything until he has been through it. But I don't complain of that. I hadn't much left to sell to anyone. Dear me ! this is worth waiting for. Now, gentlemen, will you be good enough to take lunch with me to-day just to celebrate the occasion ? I am a bachelor myself, but I have an excellent housekeeper who knows how to cook, and we'll have some poultry, plenty of vegetables, some real good stilton and a little fruit. I can't give you coffee to finish up with because the Boers haven't left me any. Right you are. I'll expect you about one o'clock. Good-bye for the present.

[Exit omnes.]

(Two hours elapse. Guests arrive fiendishly hungry a quarter of an hour ahead of time.)

HOST. Glad to see you back, gentlemen. This is a great honour for me. You ought to be quite hungry by this time. After all, a good appetite is the best aid to digestion, eh ?

A Small Comedy

*Enter HOUSEKEEPER, flour on her hands,
consternation on her face.*

HOUSEKEEPER. Somebody's taken all our fowls, sir! They were running about in the yard half an hour ago, just as usual, and now there is not a solitary one left.

HOST. Did you see anyone in the yard?

HOUSEKEEPER. There were some men with "A" on their shoulders, but I didn't see them take anything.

1st GUEST. Oh, no, they would never think of taking anything that did not belong to them.

HOST. What does that "A" stand for? "Australia," ain't it?

1st GUEST. Er—er—Ye—e—s. I mean no. It means "A" Squadron or Company; no particular regiment.

HOST. Oh, I see. Well, never mind. I suppose the poor fellows are hungry. We can't begrudge them a decent meal once in a way.

STOREMAN (*hatless and breathless: arrived in great hurry*). Sir! There is a big crowd of soldiers at the back driving all our sheep away.

HOST. Surely not. Excuse me, gentlemen, for a few moments. This is becoming a trifle too bad. Do they generally treat British subjects like this? I'll be back in a few moments—and then to lunch. [Exit.

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An hour elapses.

HOST (*somewhat less jauntily*). Awfully sorry to have kept you waiting so long for your lunch, gentlemen. You must have quite an appetite by this time.

GUESTS. We're not in the least bit hungry, sir. Don't you trouble about us. We breakfasted rather late this morning. (*As a matter of fact they hadn't eaten since daylight*).

HOST. All the same it is past two o'clock now. I'll go and hurry them up in the kitchen.

[*Goes off.*]

FEMALE VOICE (*from back premises*). Look here, sir, we're positively ruined. The soldiers have taken all my fowls and ducks; they've got away with all the sheep, and there they are after my geese now.

MALE VOICE (*considerably raised*). Hi! there! Put that down. Drop it. By the holy smoke, this is a bit too thick. Clear out, you d——d scoundrels, or I'll give you in charge. Drop that goose, I tell you. (*More quietly*) Now, can't you hurry up the lunch? These gentlemen have been waiting for the last two hours. They must be ravenous.

FEMALE VOICE. I haven't anything left worth putting on the table. The soldiers have even pulled up all my vegetables. I'm at my wits' end to know what to do.

MALE VOICE (*specifically*). Well, do the best you can, only be quick. (*Then cheer-*

A Small Comedy

fully as he rejoins his guests) Now, gentlemen, we sha'n't be long. Just give the good lady another ten minutes. Let us sit out on the stoep and give her a chance. By Jove! this has been a bit of a surprise to me, I can tell you. I always thought that the British soldier was a tough sort of customer when let loose, but I never anticipated that he would treat a fellow-countryman like this. The Boers used to tell me that I should rue the day when the British army entered the town, and I am beginning to think they knew what—Good God, there's a man actually getting through my bedroom window. If that isn't the coolest piece of business I ever saw! Hi! there! Come out of that, you blackguard. Excuse me, gentlemen, for a moment. (*He rushes off: grabs Tommy by the heels and hauls him back.*) Upon my soul, this is about the most exciting day I have put in for some time. I suppose they'll take my Cape cart and pair of horses next.

STOREMAN (*re-entering*). Sir! That man who borrowed your cart and horses hasn't come back yet.

HOST. What man? I never authorised anyone to take it. Do you mean to say you let it go out of your possession without my authority?

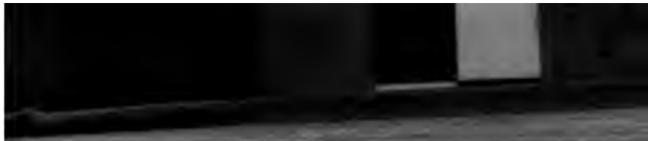
STOREMAN. He said you had lent it to him for an hour and drove away.

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Host. I'm positively ruined then. Absolutely nothing left. I must go at once to the Provost-Marshal and report this. Will you excuse me, gentlemen, just for a few minutes longer? [Goes off.

1st GUEST. I'm going back to camp to try and rake up something to eat there. I don't know what you fellows intend to do.

CHORUS. We're with you, old chap. Lead on. [Exit omnes.



CHAPTER XVI

FROM THE ZAND TO THE RAND

WE crossed the Vet at the drift which we had just carried by storm, and camped on the northern side. The day was then far spent; so were the horses and the men. But there was a little job to be done before morning—a ticklish bit of business which required grit and endurance—so the Canadians, having had least rushing about during the day, were told off for duty. They were to escort a party of N.S.W. Engineers across country to a spot on the railway line north of Smaldeel, and blow up a culvert, with the object of preventing the enemy from getting away further north with their rolling stock and supplies. Colonel Parrott, Officer Commanding Engineers, entrusted Captain Cope-land with the task. The party, which included native guides, set out through the pitch darkness on this dangerous mission, feeling their way cautiously and noiselessly from point to point. The culvert was

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reached at one o'clock next morning: it was blown up with guncotton, and then there only remained the journey back. On the way, however, the guides lost their bearings, and both Engineers and escort narrowly escaped butting their heads against a Boer laager. They ran against the outposts, and on being challenged made a bolt for it, under an irritating fire from the rear. There were no casualties, and the party reached camp just as the column was moving forward to Smaldeel.

The West Australians and N.S.W. Mounted Rifles entered this village early in the morning, only to find that the Boers had cleared out by rail the previous night, an hour before the Engineers blew up the line. They had cleared the stores of most things likely to be of use to us, and trekked north in great haste. Away in the dim distance we occasionally heard loud booming noises, which suggested dynamite explosions along the line. We found afterwards that they had blown up the permanent way behind them, at intervals of every 100 yards or so.

Headquarters camp was pitched here for a day or two, but the Mounted Infantry were pushed forward on the left of the railway line, with a view of overhauling the tail of the Boer convoy. Baggage, sick horses and sick men were left in laager at Welgelegen

From the Zand to the Rand

Siding. The remainder, relieved of impedimenta, made further north. Two miles from Zand River we stumbled on the whole Boer army, but we had the river bed between us. The far bank, being heavily timbered, afforded cover for their marksmen; beyond, on the slope of the hill, was gathered together the three large commandoes, officered respectively by De La Rey, De Wet and Botha. Their guns and wagons had only just crossed the drift, and stood in picturesque confusion, amid masses of troops, none of whom seemed to have a clear idea of what might be expected of them. They dodged about hither and thither, without any sign of order, and in their midst two heavily-laden trains, with steam up, ready to remove to a safer distance at a word. Then the wagons commenced slowly to wind up in a long straggling line to the summit of the hill, and stealthily but surely the river banks were strengthened.

Lieutenant Tooth, with a small scouting party, crept down to within a few hundred yards of the railway bridge, and from here could be seen the final preparations for demolishing the structure. Tooth and party fired at the men who were laying the charge, but at this time it was too late to stop the explosion. Two spans on the northern side went down with a tearing crash; two columns of dense smoke shot into the air, and two

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appalling reports smote the ear almost concurrently. The bridge was destroyed.

At this stage the Mounted Infantry Brigade was within 2000 yards of the river —the Canadians on the extreme left, then the New South Welshmen, and two batteries of Royal Artillery. The guns were outranged almost as a matter of course. They came up over the brow of the hill overlooking the Boers, and stood helplessly *en masse*, with the ambulances and Engineer equipment wagons immediately in their rear. We were but a small flying column of Mounted Infantry, with a few pop-guns in case of emergency. The inevitable happened. We could see it coming for a quarter of an hour, and invited it rather than otherwise. Lieutenants McLean and Onslow, with "A" Squadron N.S.W. Mounted Rifles, had been pushed down as far as a Kaffir kraal overlooking the river bed, and just as they reached this bit of cover, over came the first of a series of shells from the Boer Long Toms, which appeared to be mounted on the railway trucks standing in the station half way up yonder hillside. It cleared the Mounted Infantry, but sailed dangerously close to the massed guns and wagons. Within five minutes nearly twice that number of guns were pouring a deadly fire of lead over the area included in our manœuvres. They were

From the Zand to the Rand

well served and accurately sighted—so accurately, in fact, that our men in retiring were obliged to cross a zone which simply rained shrapnel bullets. Three men were badly hit, and more than that number of horses. To make matters more uncomfortable, Boer marksmen waded the river above and below the drift, and enfiladed us as we galloped back.

Then the guns were trained upon our artillery, which stood unlimbered, but absolutely impotent to return the compliment at that range. The ambulance wagons retired to a safer spot; so did the Engineer Corps, and finally, without having said a word, our guns were withdrawn from the field of action. "The object of the reconnaissance having been accomplished," etc., etc., the men returned to Welgelegen, where the convoy had camped earlier in the day.

There we remained until, on the 10th of May, the main column came up, and we once more went ahead to clear the way. The army proper crossed at the drift alongside the railway bridge. Now there are drifts *and* drifts, but this was quite a type to itself. On the southern side you approach by precipitous, stony, zigzag cuttings, which admit of but one vehicle at a time; then with a rush and a splash you find your mules and wagons struggling in two feet of water over a sub-

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merged stone causeway six or eight yards wide, with deep water at either edge ; and when you have struggled through this you are face to face with a slippery cutting, graded to about one in one. Slowly and painfully, to the accompaniment of lurid and picturesque language, your column crawls across. Thousands upon thousands of wagons are waiting their turn impatiently from sunrise to sunset. The southern bank for miles round is dotted with troops, convoy, big and little guns, buck wagons, Cape carts and all the rest. Transport officers swear and work like any nigger ; 100 darkies are put on with pick and shovel to try and reduce the grades on either side, but they can only get to work at odd moments ; the stream of wagons must not stop for a minute. Now a correspondent's cart has stuck in the middle, and men waist deep in water have to hitch on four more mules. The air grows dense with promiscuous oaths as the cart gets more and more hopelessly bogged. The approaches become more and more congested ; drivers will edge their way down to the river, in or out of their turn, if they see a quarter of a chance, and then there is more "language." For forty-eight hours, without a break, this struggle goes on, and then perhaps the straining mass begins to grow thinner. By this time the northern bank is one confused tangle

From the Zand to the Rand

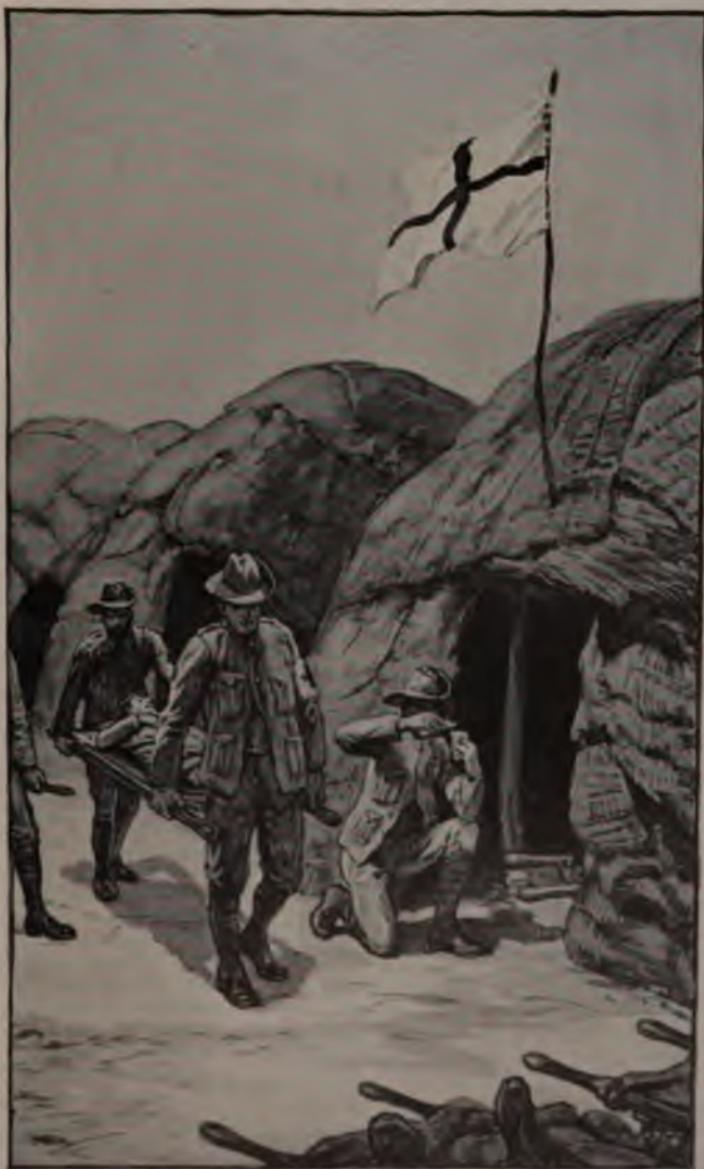
of black boy, mule, bullock and dust; there are troops mounted and troops on foot, balloons here and there skimming over the surface of the ground in clouds of red sand, rumbling wagons, ambulances of all sizes and patterns, howitzers, pom-poms and Maxims jostling one another for precedence, mobs of driven sheep and bullocks growing appreciably thinner as the regimental butcher gets at them—the whole mass pressing onward and ever onward, in trailing clouds of dust, rent by the demoniacal yells of the niggers and the rifle-like crack of their long bamboo whips. Over the trackless veldt they beat out for themselves broad, snaky roadways, which run approximately parallel for a dozen miles, and then—another drift, always worse than the last.

Hutton's Brigade, instead of crossing here with the rest, made a wide westerly sweep in the direction of Du Preez's Laager, and got over the river there. On the way up, some Mounted Rifles who had been left behind as baggage guard were told off to escort the guns in a little, but rather disastrous, action at Kaalong (*Anglice*, bare hill). It was here that the Inniskillings, Carabineers, Scots Greys and Australian Horse rushed an imperfectly-scouted position, and, being outmanœuvred, had to retire in disorder under a heavy fire. Twenty-one Inniskillings and Carabineers were wounded and fourteen killed, including two

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officers. Among the Australian Horse two were wounded and seven taken prisoner. Four of these were allowed to go back to attend to the wounded, and while thus engaged were recaptured by their own men. The N.S.W. Medical Corps on this occasion did some hard and useful work. They happened to be passing on their way from Welgelegen to join Hutton's Brigade, but as there was no Royal Army Medical Corps ambulance within reach, they took what came first to their hand. Major Eames was in charge of the hospital, which in this case took the form of Kaffir kraals. They knocked holes through the mats to let in air and light, turned the negro household gods on to the veldt and disinfected the floors and rooms. They dealt with every case and saw that each was comfortably conveyed back to hospital at Ventersburg Siding before moving on.

The Brigade in the meantime had worked its way up to a spot some few miles north of Kroonstadt on the railway line, and consequently were not present at the official entry into the town. Ian Hamilton's Division, with which had been incorporated some N.S.W. Mounted Infantry, came up on the east and camped over against us, but instead of returning our men to their Brigadier, General Hamilton took over the whole of the Second Corps of the First Brigade, including the 6th



Drawn by Norman H. Hardy

Sketch by Frank Williamson

OUR HOSPITAL AT KAALONG

'Australia at the Front'

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Mounted Infantry, the N.S.W. and West Australian Mounted Rifles. From that day until the end of the campaign we were never under the command of General Hutton, although we dodged about from one brigadier to another fairly frequently.

At Kroonstadt it had been reported that the Boers were strongly entrenched further north, on the banks of the Rhenoster River—a position which it would have been difficult to take by frontal attack, so Hamilton's Division started out east for Lindley and Heilbron with the object of making a wide turning movement and coming in on the railway line behind the Boer position at the Rhenoster. This move had the desired effect ; there was no more fight left in them when they recognised the possibility of their line of retreat being cut off.

After two days' march we landed in Lindley on May 18th without a fight worth speaking of. The Derbyshire Mounted Infantry garrisoned the town ; Hamilton took possession formally. Our outposts were sniped at all the following day by parties of Boers who had cleared out of the town as we entered. They followed us out on the Sunday and potted at our rearguard as we headed off towards Heilbron. In the meantime the N.S.W. Mounted Rifles, who were acting as advance guard to the column that day, got on to the

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tail of a Boer commando trekking ahead of us and in the same direction. Roberts's Horse and the Buffs, who brought up our rear, were rather badly mauled about that day, and some of our wagons were very nearly captured, but the commando ahead of us took things very coolly. Our Mounted Infantry, as usual, were not well supported by artillery, consequently they were unable to press far forward without risk of being cut off. The Boers retired leisurely, even stopping occasionally to jeer at our puny efforts at damaging them.

Next day New South Wales was in the rear of the column. Shortly after it had got under way a party of Boers, 300 or 400 strong, hove in sight, careering gaily towards us with little apparent concern as to what lay ahead of them. "B," "A," "E" and "D" Squadrons at this time and in this order were lining a series of kopjes overlooking a farmhouse, past which the column had just marched. They withheld their fire until the leading horsemen were well within range, and then blazed away in volleys. The Boers drew rein, staggered for the moment, and took cover at the farm, but "D" Squadron, on our extreme right, moved round to a position from which they enfiladed that side of the farm which was unexposed to the fire from the other squadrons, and the enemy scattered in all directions. We retired just as they were

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reforming for a second attack, and just here Lieutenant Onslow, while mounting his horse, received a bullet through the knee-cap ; it entered at the back of the knee and drilled a small clean hole through the bone. Private W. C. M'Donald of "E" Squadron was hit even more badly, and in a more serious part of the anatomy, but both men had to ride some few miles to the nearest ambulance wagon for medical treatment.

From rearguard we were shifted round to the left flank as Heilbron appeared in the distance, and on this day we marched and rested without fighting. Ahead of us the cavalry and artillery got in a bit of dashing work, capturing fifteen wagons and nine prisoners just as the Boer convoy was leaving the township. The enemy, on this occasion, made a very plucky stand, but our guns were too much for them ; they couldn't remain in one spot for more than a few minutes together.

By Thursday, May 24th, we had junctioned with the main column at Vredefort, a few miles north of Prospect on the railway line, and as this was the Queen's Birthday—a festival religiously observed in Australia—we made things merry on an extra rum ration, which the Quartermaster served out as a special favour. If you know anything of the regulation rum ration you will readily understand

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that one can't have a too gorgeous time on one's ordinary allowance, even when taken neat, as most men do take it, after a few weeks of campaigning, but whenever you hear a cheer going round the lines you may rely upon it, nine times out of ten, that rum, or rather the prospect of it, has done the trick. On this particular night there was double cheering, and almost a double allowance. Then we stood round in great-coats on the bleak veldt and drank the health of Her Majesty. Lanterns flickered here and there among the muffled figures, their light catching the blue white of the raised pannikins as the Colonel gave the toast, and, in the absence of a band, we yelled the refrain double forte. I have never heard the National Anthem more strikingly framed.

Two days later we had crossed the Vaal into Transvaal territory. Again we were put on the left flank, in advance of the main column, but from here right up to Johannesburg no one knew where anyone else was; columns crossed and recrossed each other's tracks daily in a manner which was quite as confusing to us as it must have been to the enemy. Darkness fell upon us as we reached the Vaal River at Boschbank Drift; we had no inkling of what might be ahead of us, and as the crossing was exceptionally bad, we found it impossible to get all the men over



From the Zand to the Rand

that night. One squadron remained behind on the south bank and lay low until dawn. Four West Australians, occupying an advance outpost, about midnight, were cleverly caught and made prisoners by wandering Boer pickets. The version of the affair which reached us went to show that one of the West Australians, who was busy cooking for his comrades in a deserted house, was pounced upon suddenly by two armed Boers and relieved of his rifle. In order to blind the others to the true state of affairs when they returned to the rendezvous, the wily captors made their man appear to mount guard over them. The three unsuspecting Australians rode into the trap and were covered by Boer rifles before they could unsling their own guns. I don't care to vouch for the accuracy of this story: it came from a Kaffir, *who said he saw the whole thing.*

On the 28th we came in sight of the Rand —a long line of chimney-stacks and sheds dimly silhouetted against the horizon, for all the world like a fleet at sea. We picked out the masts and the hulls quite distinctly as we sat on the tops of our kopjes and waited for instructions. From time to time deep muffled boomings floated down to us; clouds of smoke rent the broadsides of these aerial vessels, and grass fires in the middle distance covered the whole scene as with a veil of



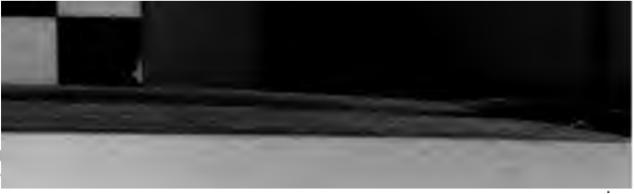
Australia at the Front

gauze. Surely the Boers must be carrying out their threat to blow up the mines! It looked extraordinarily like it. But later, as we peered and peered through the dense atmosphere, there appeared in the distance, miles ahead a thin line of troops marching stolidly forward through a veritable valley of death. To their right towered a lofty range of forbidding mountains, and to their left the enemy's fleet. Guns were trained upon this intrepid column from both flanks. Pom-pom shells seemed to rain upon them. Never before had we heard such an appalling growl of heavy artillery, and yet, when the day's work was over General French had only lost nine men—two killed and seven wounded. Much ado for a very small result. The rattle of the Vickers-Maxim, and the deeper thud of the Long Tom, lulled us to sleep that night and awoke us early the following morning. French and Hutton, they said, had been forced to retire in face of this tremendous fusilade, and they were now re-occupying their former positions. To our right, as we moved off to make a diversion on the left, we watched squadron after squadron of cavalry gallop dauntlessly up to the cannon's mouth, gaining ground painfully inch by inch, but always falling back under the hail of lead from the enemy's pom-poms. They formed and reformed times out of number, but made

From the Zand to the Rand

little real headway. Hamilton, in the meantime, having skirted round some distance to the left, sent up a long thin line of Gordon Highlanders, widely extended, to carry the position at the point of the bayonet, and gallantly they did it.

Simultaneously the Second Corps of Mounted Infantry, under Colonel de Lisle, which had been dodging along somewhat aimlessly for the greater part of the day, cursing their luck at being out of the scrimmage, suddenly pulled up in front of the extreme left of the enemy's position. In proportion as the Boers had extended their front, so we had ridden round and further round, until finally we were able to attack their right flank, which happened to lie at the extreme west of the line of mines which runs almost due west from Johannesburg. This was the only vulnerable point in a phenomenally strong position, and De Lisle at once seized upon it, although he played rather a risky hand. It was already growing dark, and one knew practically nothing as to the strength of the enemy at that point. More than this, the three or four miles of intervening country between us and them was honeycombed with dykes and ugly-looking barriers which made one shudder in broad daylight. But the end justified the means, and De Lisle has seldom erred on the side of timidity. It was the



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consummate cheek of the movement which ensured its success. Those who rode in that wild charge won't forget the sensation for some time.

As I said just now, we had reached a spot within close view of the first mine in the long chain which forms the Rand, and here, quite suddenly, we found ourselves exposed to a heavy fire from the Boer guns posted near the mine buildings, which cut the sky-line over against us. It was growing rapidly darker, but as the guns were being served with black powder it was possible to locate their position. Well, here we stood for a space of five minutes, wondering what was going to happen next; some of us, who had no special call to be there except as spectators, began to think of looking round for a dry ditch in which to camp for the night, when we were startled out of our usual serenity by an inexplicable movement in front. The N.S.W. Mounted Rifles were ordered to "walk, march," then trot, and as they dropped down into the valley beyond they broke into a mad gallop, with which it was impossible to keep up without imminent risk of a broken neck —every few yards a veldt fire, an open ditch, a half-concealed well, or a wire fence, practically invisible until you were just on top of it. It was a wild cavalry charge without swords or lances. I suppose if it had come



Drawn by Norman H. Hardy

Sketch by Frank Wilkinson

A VELD'T FIRE





From the Zand to the Rand

to a close thing, hand to hand, we should have fixed bayonets, but the sudden, onward, irresistible daring rush had the demoralising effect which was intended, and the Boers fled in all directions at our approach. "D" Squadron, led by Lieutenant Legge, who happened to be on the extreme left, pushed round the summit of the hill until he came under the fire of "E" Squadron, but the mistake was rectified without casualty. Legge swooped down upon a Cape cart, alongside which two men were standing. He called upon them to surrender, but one of them refused and dropped on his knee to fire. Legge, still remaining cool, managed to convey to the other the futility of firing at a whole squadron, and the man, who turned out to be Commandant P. Botha, handed over his rifle. His *aide-de-camp* had previously relinquished his.

We went into camp at Florida in the hope that we should soon see Johannesburg. That night a message to the following effect was sent to our camp from the Commander-in-Chief:—

"I am gratified at your success, and grieved beyond measure that your poor fellows are without their proper rations. A train full shall go to you to-morrow. I expect to get notice very soon that Johannesburg surren-



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ders, and we shall then march into town. I wish your column, which has done so much to gain possession of it, could be with us. Tell the Gordons I am proud to think that I have a Highlander as one of the supporters of my coat-of-arms."

So we were not to see the Golden City after all—just yet.

CHAPTER XVII

HINTS TO CORRESPONDENTS

No subject causes the novice at war corresponding more anxious thought than his outfit, and on few points is it more difficult to offer advice. The conditions of each succeeding campaign differ so materially that one wants a fresh set of rules for each. But there are certain broad principles which it might be useful to lay down for the guidance of those who have not had much to do with military people in England.

In the first place, and above all, don't go into the business with any wild idea that you are to be the honoured guest of the British Army. It won't work. I met a Canadian correspondent at De Aar who had arrived on the scene with some such impression. That was about all he had in the way of outfit, and it didn't last long. He subsequently took to despatch-riding in sheer desperation. The rest of the Canadians came out attached to their own troops either

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as correspondents or "regimental historians," and in this way they were fairly well provided for.

But if you can't be a "regimental historian," take a title into the field with you—it will help you along immensely. Failing a peerage or a baronetcy, be sure to represent a big paper like the London *Times*—it is the next best thing. In the absence of any of those qualifications, Heaven help you; you will find every man's hand against yours, and you will look in vain to the kopjes from whence no help cometh. Whatever the War Office can devise to make your path less smooth will assuredly befall you, but be of good cheer. Trust in yourself and leave nothing to chance or the military. Also, don't have anything to do with Staff officers unless it is absolutely necessary. In that contingency make a point of calling captains "majors," majors "colonels," and colonels "generals." It works nine times out of ten. Shun junior subalterns as you would typhoid germs; if they can't block your progress or inconvenience you in some way or another they will certainly make a point of being rude to you. I find it an excellent principle never to have anything to do with an Imperial officer under the rank of major.

Don't trust too much to your colleagues



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for advice or assistance. They are all fighting their own battles single-handed, and they have bought their experience at too high a figure to give it away gratis. Find things out for yourself, even if you suffer the discomforts of the damned in so doing. It's just as well to get acquainted with hunger and thirst early in a campaign.

In the matter of outfit you will be guided largely by the conditions of the country in which you are about to travel. Away from railway lines, in sparsely-populated districts, provide yourself with some conveyance—preferably of the type in which you can live. It must be light but strong, and have it fitted up at the base under your own supervision. Ten months in South Africa has convinced me that the four-wheeled wagon is the best for that country. See that it is high enough to stand up in and long enough to stretch out in. Partition off the rear portion and have it fitted with shelves to hold your stores and cooking gear. For the rest, have a table made which will lie flat against the inside of the wagon when not in use—you will probably find it handiest to use hinges for this purpose. In case you should want to sleep in the cart, see that it is fitted with a broad piece of stout canvas properly eyeletted, so that you can hook it up from side to side like a hammock, except that you will find it more

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comfortable to stretch it from side to side instead of fore and aft. The buttons and eyelet holes generally used for buggy hoods do admirably for this purpose. Then you want a folding-chair, and there you are.

If you are a photographer you will find it expedient to develop your films as you go along. It is much more satisfactory than the other method of posting the undeveloped work home and trusting to the people at the other end to see that the proper titles are attached. It is so easy for them to mix negatives up, and so difficult for you to explain things clearly unless you have the picture in front of you. You may write columns of interesting matter round a roll of negatives which turn out unfit for reproduction, and your time is wasted. If you develop as you go along you see at once what will reproduce—whether it will make a two or four column block, or whether it is worth enlarging upon on the letterpress. I admit the inconvenience of doing dark-room work on the field, especially where there is a scarcity of water, but campaigning itself is an inconvenience. See that the hood of your wagon is fairly light-tight, and have the front flap made of yellowish or reddish canvas so that the moonlight won't hurt the negatives. Personally I found a little khaki tent of the "D'Abri" pattern all that could



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be desired in the way of a dark room, and I have used it a great deal during the campaign. Ordinary moonlight through this material won't fog your negatives, and if you have to do with a brilliant full moon, it is an easy matter to throw a blanket over that side of the tent on which the light is beating. You will, of course, require a red lamp for the inside and a few dishes. Your developers, fixers, etc., may all be obtained in the tabloid form. They take up no room worth mentioning, and are always fresh. If you have studied the chemistry of photography you will probably find it easier to develop big batches of negatives by means of concentrated solutions; but the amateur should not try risky experiments on valuable work.

When you have developed, wash the negatives in your canvas bath-tub or some other handy receptacle, and pin the films to the hood of the wagon, either inside or out, according to the climate. I had to manage with the hood of a Cape cart during the whole of this campaign, and found some difficulty in drying owing to the heavy dews and the necessity for packing up my traps ready for the line of march by daylight each morning. If you have a covered-in wagon the films will be safe from dust and will dry as you go along. Thus, you see, you have your pictures ready for printing or posting. You

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know exactly what you have got to write about, whether you have made any double exposures, and whether you have taken in just what you wanted. I shouldn't bother about the printing in the field. They will do it much more satisfactorily in the office at home; and you want a clean, well-toned specimen to stand reproduction. I think the special war artist would be able to utilise photography to greater advantage if he would take the trouble to develop his own pictures as he went along.

Travel light; don't overweight your cart with useless lumber. Beyond the photographic paraphernalia to which I have referred, your blankets, a change of clothes and the cooking gear—which should all be of enamelled iron—you must carry enough tinned food to keep you going for say six weeks, and forage enough for three or four. And when you have got this little lot aboard you will find that you require a team of four good horses or mules to carry your little caravan along comfortably. I should take mules in preference; they will go far longer on nothing at all than horses, and they are more easily looked after. You will have to hitch them to the pole of the wagon at nights—two on either side—and feed them out of a strip of canvas stretched over the pole. During the night they will probably jerk the

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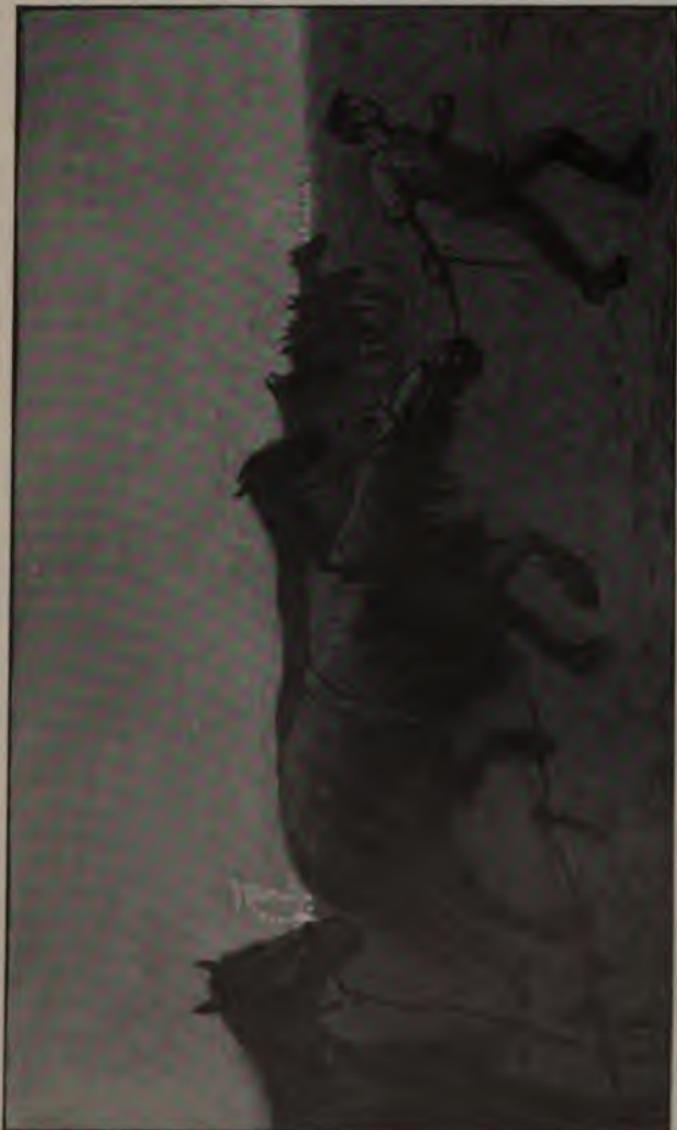
conveyance about a good deal, but you get accustomed to that. If you take horses instead of mules, I should advise you to tether each one separately to iron picket pegs, and see that they are all within view of the head of your bunk, for they have a knack of disappearing most mysteriously in the middle of the night.

See that they are all properly branded with your initials. It won't do, as a general rule, to snip out the letters on the horse's rump with scissors, although that is better than no brand at all. The trouble is, that it is so easily removed. You should carry a branding iron with you and have each horse or mule well marked on the neck or shoulder and both fore-hoofs. You will find this useful not only as a means of identification, but as a preventative against theft. A man who is short of a horse will invariably pick up the first stray animal which does not carry a conspicuous brand. He can easily get rid of the hoof marks with a decent file, but not the shoulder brand if it is well burnt in. But, brand or no brand, your horses are bound to disappear occasionally.

During our first occupation of Lindley, in May, I was camped for a couple of days with an American correspondent, in a paddock adjoining the local chemist's shop. We entered with Ian Hamilton's column on the 18th and left early on the 20th. Before

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daylight on the morning of the evacuation we were disturbed by the hurried closing of the paddock gate. In ordinary circumstances a detail of that description would not cause you two seconds' thought, but after you have lived with an army for a week or two you will learn instinctively to associate every strange sound in the middle of the night with an attempt to kidnap your horse stock. We were out of our bunks like a shot. Of course! one horse gone, blanket, headstall and all!! And one of the best of the cart-horses at that. Would you believe that it had been unhitched from its peg not six feet from the head of our tent? Without waiting to put on boots or coats we raced for the gate which we had just heard bang. The cold made our teeth chatter, and the heavy dew struck through our socks, but if we didn't overtake and recover that horse we should be left behind the column when it moved and probably made prisoners. The Derbyshire Mounted Infantry were camped in the middle of the Market Square about a hundred yards away: their fires had already been lit for boiling the morning coffee, and the men were preparing a hasty meal preparatory to starting. A sentry was pacing briskly up and down in front of the Bank of Africa, just over the way from us. We asked him if he had seen a man leading a horse out of our paddock. Yes, he had. He



Drawn by Norman H. Hardy
'Australia at the Front'

A THIEF IN THE NIGHT

Sketch by Frank Wilkinson

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told us which direction to take, but as he was a Derbyshire man himself we took leave to doubt his word—happily for us, as it turned out. While we talked with him the silhouette of a man with a led horse crossed directly in front of a large camp fire in the centre of the square, and we gave chase. Reaching the lines we found every man busy grooming down his horse. None of them had by any possible chance seen a stray animal about. We asked permission of the officer commanding to make a search, and carefully scrutinised each charger. Suddenly the American pulled up, and I saw him raise one corner of a blanket which covered a grey horse—the only animal in the lines with a blanket on. “Does anyone claim this horse?” he roared in a decidedly aggressive tone. No answer. Every man was busy grooming down his own horse. “Does anyone claim this?” he repeated in a still louder tone. Still no reply. Slowly and deliberately he untied the animal and led it out of the lines. Nobody cared to interfere.

If the horse hadn't been properly branded we should have had some difficulty in establishing our claim to it. I remember an incident at Poplar Grove which will serve to bear out this hypothesis. We had been horribly short of fodder for days. The supply column was about two days' march behind us,



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and there were no farmhouses within reach. My horses hadn't had a square feed for three days. I expected every hour to see them knock up and leave me stranded. Just as we left camp one morning I led my saddle pony a little way off so that he could get a pick at a few blades of grass which still survived. As I drove him slowly back a sergeant-major came up, desiring to know what in the name of all that was secular I was doing with his horse! I suggested the possibility that the beast might belong to me, but he missed the sarcasm and ran off to bring another fellow to help him identify it. By the time they had returned the pony was saddled up, but they were dead certain that it belonged to them. Unfortunately for me it hadn't anything in the nature of a brand by which I could positively swear to it. It cost me two hours of hard work collecting witnesses to establish my claim.

I have said that we were short of forage at Poplar Grove. That was because we hadn't yet learnt not to depend on the military people for our supply. On paper you are allowed to draw rations and forage at fixed prices—five shillings per day per horse, and four shillings per day each for yourself and servant. In a base camp you may find it convenient to purchase even at these exorbitant rates, in which case you will have to lodge a

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sum of £10 or £20 with the Chief Paymaster, and draw against it until your voucher is exhausted. But on the line of march don't depend on the daily ration ; if you do you will find that half your time is taken up in rooting round for the main supply dépôt, and in nine cases out of ten you won't find it. While you are looking, you are hungering and needlessly distressing an already underfed horse. But obviously you can't carry enough forage in your wagon to last four or five horses many days at a stretch, and this fact has decided me in favour of a second conveyance for forage only. Put it in charge of a reliable man, and let him drive along some little distance off the main route, picking up oats and mealies at farmhouses as he goes along. You will then have a constant supply in reserve.

Of course, in addition to all this, you will require a nigger to do all the dirty work of the camp. Be sure and see to it that your man whacks the nigger once a day, or as much oftener as time and opportunity will permit. He will work all the better for it.

Never go out, even on what promises to be a small show, unprepared to stop out indefinitely. One peculiar feature about campaigning is that you leave one camp presumably for a couple of hours, and find yourself unable to get back inside six weeks or two months. Also, when you are out, keep a



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watchful eye on your conveyance. The average nigger is just as useful in an emergency as a graven image. If you would be absolutely safe against accident, carry a great-coat and blanket on your saddle, and always make sure that there are biscuits in your wallets, as well as water in your water-bottle. A small iron picket peg slung during the day from one of the D's in the saddle will enable you to tether your horse at night without trouble, if you happen to miss your cart. But all this means extra weight for your saddle-horse. The chances are that after a time you will begin to leave these articles in your cart, and trust to luck about picking it up at night. About the second time you try this on, you will spend a cold and hungry night on the veldt, and waste the next couple of days in chasing your nigger.

Listen to what happened near the Springs—that little coal-mining centre which is connected by rail with Johannesburg. There was not a cloud in the sky on this particular morning—June 21st—and I rode light, intending to keep within touch of the wagons. About midday we had a tropical hailstorm. The thermometer dropped twenty or thirty degrees in a couple of hours, and rain set in for the day. My coat, of course, was in my cart, miles behind, so I scrambled into the first ambulance wagon and led the horse

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behind. In this way I reached camp fairly dry, but very cold. The men were pitching their blanket tents in the middle of a quagmire; horses stood and shivered as though smitten with ague. Fires were out of the question for the time. The officers sheltered in a row of disused workmen's cottages, the floors of which were covered with seed potatoes just beginning to sprout.

After two hours of continuous rain I set off to find the N.S.W. wagons, with which I had left my cart. The wagons were just coming into camp—they had been near the tail end of the column—but no sign of the cart. I made inquiries. "Oh," said a sergeant, "one of the horses knocked up, and the thing is stuck about three miles back in the middle of a swamp." Everything I owned was in that wretched vehicle. Riding back, coatless, through the pitiless rain, I found the darkey on the outskirts of the camp about two miles off. He was absolutely lost, and just then on the point of outspanning for the night. One animal was quite knocked up, so I put my saddle-horse in his place and brought the caravan up a mile or so. It was then quite dark—the camp a huge sea of flickering lights. Twenty thousand men, and nearly the same number of horses, spreading out over the veldt almost as far as the eye could reach. The farthest lights appeared to

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be ten miles away, and somewhere within this magic circle lay the N.S.W. Mounted Infantry, with whom I had been travelling. Leaving nigger, with until I returned to camp. I was wet through; no one had

in charge of the sections not to move ed out to find our , north, south, east cuttings and into f hours, absolutely No sign of camp; idea where anyone else was. No regiment appeared to know even its next-door neighbour. I let my pony wander round aimlessly—too hopeless to bother about directing its movements, and finally I reached my goal. But by this time I hadn't the faintest idea in which direction I had left the cart. I took a hasty meal; started out with a fresh horse and a lantern to try and locate it. Lieutenant M'Glinn, our quartermaster, accompanied me. Well, we wandered round that wretched, sodden camp in pouring rain for another two hours, and once more lost ourselves as completely as though we had been in the middle of the Australian bush. Lost! and among 20,000 troops. We couldn't find the cart, and when we gave that up we couldn't find our camp; and all the time we were dragging that extra horse about with us. Can you imagine it? It happens to somebody or

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other almost every day on the line of march.

By the way, why should there not be distinguishing lights shown by the different corps or regiments in these big camps—lights corresponding with the flags by which they are known in the daytime? They would save hours of fruitless searching.

About midnight we stumbled upon the object of our search—the N.S.W. camp, not the cart. At daylight we were out again, and the column was beginning to move; surely now, when a few thousand men had cleared off the premises, there should be some sign of it. But no! that darkey, imagining himself deserted, had hitched up his horses again and joined in the procession. Where to find him? The Division was travelling in three long columns each about a mile apart. Each line of wagons dragged out for six or eight miles over the veldt, and so many Cape carts in each. There was nothing for it but to commence at the head of the first, travel slowly back to its rear; then take up the second and worm our way right up to the head; and finally, if nothing had turned up, start on the third line. We found it hopelessly trailing in the rear of the third column, and then scoured round for fresh horses to pull it. We picked up a stray mule and borrowed a horse, brought them back, and

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changed. By four o'clock in the afternoon the cart was once more restored to its proper position in its proper column !

After a few experiences like this I took to carrying an overcoat on the saddle, even on bright sunny days. I think it would pay you to hire a white man to look after the black boy and the cart.

CHAPTER XVIII

PRETORIA AND DIAMOND HILLS

EVEN after the formal capitulation of Johannesburg, the city—or rather the white portion of it—remained a sealed book to us. On June 1st, Hamilton marched through the Kaffir location, amid a tremendous demonstration, as spontaneous on the part of the niggers as it was primitive. Only those who were unhampered by regimental orders, and a few who were sent in on business, had a chance of seeing the inside of the town, and it was not much of a gold mine then, as far as stores were concerned. We couldn't buy aught that was of the slightest use; shops were barricaded and deserted; a few hotels remained open, but whisky was at a premium of about ten shillings a bottle, and beer almost un procurable. No clothes worth wearing could be procured, but one or two regiments supplied themselves with new boots. The best available, however, were rather of the Regent Street variety than the campaigner's. There was not

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a horse-shoe in town, and these we needed worst of all. The Boers had looted the place before us.

We camped four miles about due north of the city, and prepared for a further trek—towards Pretoria. On June 3rd we did a fifteen-mile march in that direction, acting as left flanking guard to the main column, and that night the Second Corps received orders to start at daybreak the following morning with two days' rations and forage for a forced march westward, with the idea of intercepting an ammunition train supposed to be on its way from Krugersdorp to the capital. We started in the dark and in the cold, equipped for a possible spell of hunger and frost, for now we had reached an altitude of something like 5000 feet above sea-level, and the nights were more than cool. No wheeled conveyances were allowed with the column on this march. We carried a couple of blankets each, and a waterproof sheet—one blanket for the horse. For the rest, we had a haversack and a nose-bag, and that was all. By eight o'clock in the morning our course was altered due north for Pretoria. The authorities had found it impossible to cut off the ammunition train. So we marched and marched and marched until near dark that night. French's column was carefully feeling its way on our left flank, and Lord Roberts, with the main column, was trekking

Pretoria and Diamond Hills

in a parallel line six miles to our right. About five o'clock we came within about eight miles of the capital, and within range of the enemy's guns, so we opened out our ranks and moved cannily under the burnt ridges. An order was sent round to Colonel De Lisle to push forward with the Second Corps, and try to get round the enemy's right flank ; so we headed nor'-nor'-west at a canter over broken, rocky ground, which played up considerably with our horses' hoofs. Captain Antill was in command of the N.S.W. Mounted Infantry on the lead ; then came Major Moor with the West Australians, and finally the 6th Mounted Infantry in rather a dilapidated formation.

Antill made for a black ridge which seemed to afford an opening, and galloped his men headlong up the last slope under a heavy fire —another wild, neck-breaking dash for something like six miles over country which would have brought down any but accomplished riders. The 6th Mounted Infantry lagged hopelessly in rear, their horses toppling over every few moments. On and on pressed the leading squadrons, taking every ounce out of their horses, for was not this to be the finishing touch to the campaign ? It was far from it, as things turned, but we didn't know it then.

The Boers, as we came up under the lee of

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the western fort, turned tail and galloped back towards the city, which lay a couple of miles off. We overhauled detached parties, and ran them to earth. Twelve prisoners were captured, and four times that number escaped narrowly by dint of hard galloping. Their horses were fresher than ours. Lieutenant Dove, of "E" Squadron, rushed five men, one of whom dismounted and turned upon his pursuer. It was just a question of which could draw a bead on the other in the shortest possible time, and Dove won. The other chap handed in his gun. Captain Holmes secured several others, and Lieutenant M'Lean, with "A" Squadron, accounted for another half-dozen.

Had we known then what we heard the following day, we need only have ridden another couple of miles and captured Pretoria that night, all to ourselves. The Boers, with guns and wagons, had actually cleared right out of town to the north, and had only engaged us during the evening so as to cover the retreat of their artillery. The forts had previously been dismantled.

But our horses were dead-beat, and Colonel De Lisle wasn't taking too many risks. As it was, he and his corps had made the grand coup, having effected an entrance at the side door, while Roberts was knocking at the front and French was careering round to try the

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back way. Instead of pressing our advantage, De Lisle decided to send in his orderly officer with a white flag, and demand the surrender of the city. Lieutenant Watson, N.S.W. Mounted Rifles, happened to be orderly officer for that day, and I think I must give his own version of the affair. He took an affectionate leave of his comrades—rather pathetically affectionate for the peaceful nature of his mission, and then :—

“ As soon as I advanced our boys stopped firing. I had not gone far when I was stopped by an artilleryman, so requested him to take me into town. He did so ; but the Landrost (chief magistrate), the Burgomaster (mayor), the Commandant-General were still fighting on the hills about the city, so the Secretary of State was found, and he conducted me to Commandant-General Botha’s private residence. He then telephoned to the Secretary for War, and they then despatched messages to their generals to come at once to a council of war. First, General Botha himself came ; then Generals Meyer and Walthusein and the military governors of the city. By this time I had been there two hours, during which time Mrs Botha kindly gave me coffee and sandwiches, which, as I had not had a square meal for thirty-six hours, were most acceptable.

“ Now came the discussion of the council.



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The General asked my mission, and this I told him with as much dignity as I could muster. 'I came with a message from Lord Roberts, demanding the immediate surrender of your capital ; if the surrender is forthcoming, all persons will be respected and property uninjured ; if not, the bombardment of the city will take place at sunrise to-morrow morning.' He looked me up and down, and told me to be seated. They all spoke in Dutch, and some of the generals were very excited. However, after an hour's chat, they drew up a letter, and Botha informed me that if I would conduct the Governor of the city to Lord Roberts, terms and conditions would be arranged. So they all shook hands with me, and said that I ought to be pleased at meeting their greatest statesmen and generals.

"Off I went with the Governor and General Walthusein to Colonel De Lisle, who was waiting on the outskirts of the city for my return. The Colonel then joined us, and away we went to Lord Roberts, who was six miles off ; so we did not arrive until 10.45 p.m. He was in bed, so just sat up and said, 'How do you do ? If General Botha wishes to discuss with me the unconditional surrender of the town, I will meet him at Colonel De Lisle's camp at 9 a.m. to-morrow. In the meantime, I will not fire a shot. Good-night.'"

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However, the following morning Botha did not keep his appointment. We were drawn up at the place of rendezvous to see the meeting between the two chiefs, but after a decent interval Lord Roberts decided to march into town. At the railway station he was met by members of the Transvaal Provisional Government, who surrendered the capital on behalf of the inhabitants. Lord Roberts, suspecting the possibility of treachery, held them as hostages, and promised them each a warm time if the troops were fired upon during the entry. All this happened while we waited on the kopjes for the conference, and before we knew where we were Roberts and his army were in possession. Colonel De Lisle's Corps was promised a march through the city that afternoon, and we actually washed on the strength of it, but subsequently the order was cancelled, and we were shunted down to a camp some miles to the south-east, with a bare glimpse of the outskirts.

During the next few days we were shifted backwards and forwards from one spot to another in the most perplexing and annoying fashion, and finally were ordered to Irene, ten miles due south on the railway line, then back again. No one seemed to know what to do with us. We made, occasionally, as many as three camps a day; no sooner had we settled down in one spot than orders came to inspan



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and trek again. We made an early start one morning, marched a dozen miles or so, "round and round the mulberry bush," as the men used to call it, spent an hour in picking a decent site, posted sentries over water-holes to prevent their pollution, put up our blanket shelters, and dressed the regimental Cape carts mathematically to an inch, and sent out wood parties to bring in enough fuel for a day or two. Everything was beautifully fixed up. You see we imagined that at last we were going to get a half holiday, because it had taken such a time to settle down. Some of us shaved, and those who had clean clothes actually contemplated a change, but this was tempting Providence too far. In the middle of all our preparations, just as the wood parties were returning laden with the wherewithal for cooking, the Sergeant-Major yelled, "March at half-past two." Jointly and individually we retorted "Damn!" and even the chaplain, I fancy, requested some layman to say it for him.

But it was all over in a minute—our men had long since learnt the grim lesson that they were not playing at war. They had everything packed up for the road at the appointed hour, and in due course we fetched up at Zwavelpoort, about twelve miles east of Pretoria, and a couple of miles south-west of Elands River Station on the Delagoa Bay line.



Drawn by Norman H. Hardy

Sketch by Frank Wilkinson

FIREWOOD FOR CAMP

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Pretoria and Diamond Hills

Here we sat down for a day or two under the lee of beetling granite kopjes, facing another range just as beetling, about six miles distant. Louis Botha was in those far hills with a strong force, and we were told that he was going to fight one more pitched battle with us before giving in.

On the morning of Saturday, June 9th, "E" Squadron N.S.W. Mounted Rifles was on outpost duty, occupying a ridge between us and Botha. The officer on duty had instructions not to disclose his position unnecessarily, so the men lay *perdu* all day. But some of Broadwood's Lancers were posted on our left flank, and the Boers immediately opened fire at long range, killing one man on the spot. On Sunday morning during the six o'clock church parade there was a continued rattle of musketry in the same spot, but little notice was taken of it. Next morning, however, we got our marching orders; we were to take three days' rations in haversacks, and move up the valley to our right, with the idea of getting round Botha's left flank. The same old game once more.

The major portion of Hamilton's Division moved up on our left in support; Pole-Carew, with the Guard's Brigade, was further to the left still, with C.I.V.'s, Gordons and Derbyshires scattered in between. We had, in addition to these troops, two 5-inch and two



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4·7 guns, also some 12-pounders, pom-poms, and Maxims. General French was to go round to the north of Botha's position so as to take him in rear, but he didn't help us very much; he hadn't marched very far before he was subjected to such a murderous artillery fire as rendered further progress inadvisable.

As for the Second Corps of Mounted Infantry, we were not in a much better plight. We marched out and up the valley for a couple of miles, and then we stopped. Widely extended, we lay down under a terrific shell fire, which appeared to proceed from every side but one. The men held their horses' bridles as they lay on the ground, and thus, without being able to return a shot, the rest of the day dragged slowly by. We were under fire from half-past eleven o'clock in the morning until dusk, and unable to get out without considerable risk. In the meantime our convoy had pushed forward in our wake, and just within range, when the danger was seen—it headed back in hot haste to the spot from which it had started.

To our right were two 12-pounders, in action. The 13th Lancers were under cover to the right of these, and some Dragoons to the left. About half-past three in the afternoon a party of Boers shot from behind a small ridge, and bore straight down on the



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guns. Our Artillery, considerably taken aback for the moment, grasped the situation, and opened out at a range of 300 yards with case shot, which did considerable havoc among the enemy, who retired in disorder. Now was the Lancers' opportunity if ever there would be one. They charged down, or, more correctly, trotted off in pursuit, in a hopeless, lolloping sort of fashion, as though they were "marching past" at the trot. Their horses, as usual, were more or less done up, and they had no more chance of catching those Boers than a cart horse would have in a race with a greyhound. They picked up a few stragglers, then wheeled fours about, still as though on parade, and retired. Of course the enemy, seeing its advantage, wheeled right about also, and whanged the bullets into our Lancers in a smart shower. Some fired from horseback, others dismounted to fire, but the whole crowd came on very pluckily, until once more stopped by case shot from our 12-pounders. The Earl of Airlie was killed during the cavalry charge.

The wounded in this, the first of the two days' fight, since designated the battle of Diamond Hills, were collected by the Second Cavalry Brigade Bearer Company and No. 1 Company N.S.W. Army Medical Corps. The majority of them were moved to Piet Joubert's farm, and thence by ox wagon back to Pre-



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toria. There were sixty-five cases in all, many of them serious, owing largely to the use of expansive bullets.

The following day (Tuesday) saw one of the biggest battles fought during the campaign, also the complete route of Botha's force, and our occupation of Diamond Hill. The N.S.W. Mounted Infantry stormed the extreme right of Botha's position at the point of the bayonet in one of the most gallant charges one ever gets an opportunity of witnessing. The fighting line extended three or four miles to our left. We stood facing a yawning gap in the mountain's side, through which Botha had dragged his heavy guns. Our 5-inch pieces had shelled this spot continuously most of the morning to cover the infantry advance on the left, and for quite three hours there was no response from the other side. The Derbys, Gordons and C.I.V.'s on the left crept up from ridge to ridge, making good use of every fold in the ground. Two pom-poms, under Captain Sterling, attached to the Second Corps' Mounted Infantry, managed to secure a lodgment, from which they commanded the Boer left, and the work done by these two guns all through the afternoon was exceptionally fine. They, and only they, rendered our advance possible. While the infantry on our left were surging slowly but surely onwards and upwards, they made a move forward *en masse*.

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New South Wales sent up four squadrons in advance—four squadrons of about thirty-five men each, and yet every available man was there. You see, by the way, how our regiment was gradually dwindling down to almost ridiculous proportions. "B" Squadron, which had been on outpost duty the previous night, were to all intents and purposes out of it.

Between our starting-point and our objective there occurred a slight ridge which allowed us to creep up unnoticed and take cover near a farmhouse, surrounded by tall gum trees. Beyond this we galloped another mile to a second ridge under a heavy fire. For the first time, to my knowledge, the Boers on this occasion adopted what is known in musketry as "mass firing." That is to say, each man fires off his clip of five cartridges more or less independently, but without an appreciable interval between each shot. Then the firing suddenly ceases for a minute or two while the barrels are cooling, and off they all go once more. The system is more or less demoralising, in so far as it conveys the impression that the fire is absolutely under control. This by the way, however.

Galloping straight for the foot of the mountain, "A" Squadron halted and dismounted, while "C" pushed straight ahead, with "D" to its right and "E" skirting round the flank. In this formation, widely spread out, they



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raced for the kopjes, while the pom-poms pounded away in their rear, sending a hail of shell over their heads. At the base the leading squadrons dismounted and scrambled up the rocks. Captain Hilliard, Lieutenants Legge, Drage, Newman and Harriott, with "C" and "D" Squadrons at their heels, rushed up simultaneously, with "E" Squadron to the right in a splendid position.

Drage was shot through the leg just as he gained the top ; he dropped forward and crawled towards a rock, but as he did so another bullet got him in the head, and he died instantaneously. Harriott was struck in the right thigh almost at the same moment with an expansive bullet. His leg, when he looked down, had turned heel foremost. He died soon after from shock to the system, before an operation could be performed. Both officers would probably have escaped if they had been a little less plucky and a little more cautious, but they have erred in the best of company. Captain Holmes received a shrapnel bullet through the right forearm, which was not dangerous. Sergeant-Major Liggins, of "E" Squadron, was hit by a bullet, which traversed the chest from shoulder to shoulder without touching a vital spot.

Having thus gained a foothold on the hill, the regiment fixed bayonets and went off again on foot at the double for the crest from

Pretoria and Diamond Hills

where the Boers were still pouring a deadly fire. I should rather have said that they were ordered to fix bayonets, for when it came to the critical moment, dozens of the men found themselves without, and many more were unable to attach them to the muzzles of their rifles. This comes of using bayonets as tent pegs and tomahawks. They get left behind in camp, or bent or damaged so effectually that they won't fit into the grooves. However, those who had lost their bayonets, or who had ruined them for life, grabbed the muzzles of their rifles and went for the hill-top, as though they intended to club the first man they might happen to meet. The enemy disputed every inch of the ground, fighting much more pluckily than we had expected at this stage of the game. They retired a few hundred yards, halted, and turned to fire; they dragged their dead and dying along with them, and in all such cases our officers gave directions to the men to hold their fire. But we took a few prisoners all the same.

After this final burst, the regiment lay on the kopje all night and bivouacked. We picked up two men of "A" Squadron who had been badly hit, and conveyed them to the N.S.W. wagons, which were not far away.

The whole of the wounded on this day were collected by the Bearer Company of the Twenty-first Brigade and No. 1 Bearer Company of the

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N.S.W. Army Medical Corps, and transferred the same evening to their respective hospitals. On the following day they were removed to Botha's Farm, Major MacC... of the N.S.V. arrangements along line had something 1 amounted to large proport... Williams, P.M.O., Captain Martin—all Medical Corps—made a frontage of 153, including the officers killed to only six men fatally hit. The Derbys suffered most heavily, losing twenty-five in killed and wounded. The C.I.V.'s came next with twenty-one, and the Sussex Regiment with fourteen. About twenty-eight per cent. of the dangerous wounds were caused by expansive bullets.

The regiment followed on Botha's heels next day as far as Bronkhurst Spruit, where Colonel De Lisle stumbled on a big force and retired to Elands River Station. The Boers had a big gun mounted on a railway truck at Bronkhurst, and 1500 men in laager, when the West Australians and "C" Squadron N.S.W. Mounted Infantry got into touch at 300 yards. We sent in a few volleys and retired, just as their Long Tom came into action. De Lisle took the big chap on with a couple of pom-poms and then withdrew.

Next day the corps was paraded before

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General Ridley, our Brigadier, who said some very nice things about us, and General Ian Hamilton issued a special General Order on the subject. It ran as follows :—

“ General Hamilton, commanding the force, has desired the Commandant to express to all ranks of the Second Corps and the pom-pom, section ‘A,’ his congratulations on their achievement on the evening of the 12th at Diamond Hill, of which he has made a special report to the Field Marshal Commanding-in-Chief. In publishing this, the Commandant wishes to express his high appreciation of the way Captain Antill and the N.S.W. Mounted Rifles advanced to take the hill yesterday, and the gallant way the regiment pushed forward beyond the crest under a murderous fire. He deeply regrets the casualties, and especially the death of Lieutenant Drage when bravely leading his men. The Commandant regrets to announce the death of Lieutenant Harriott, N.S.W. Mounted Rifles, who died yesterday of the wound he received on the 12th instant whilst gallantly leading his men.—(Signed) R. FANSHAWE, Captain, S.O., De Lisle’s Corps.”



CHAPTER XIX

ON THE MARCH

HAVE you any idea how a British army moves through an enemy's country? Do you know what it involves to feed a huge column, 20,000 strong, on a long march, away from railway lines and depôts? Did it ever strike you that the fighting portion of a force depends for its ability to go on fighting upon a line of transport wagons labouring along in its wake? Can you guess to a hundred or two at the number of tons of food and baggage which a regiment, say 500 strong, requires to keep it going? Have you ever tried to realise what happens to that regiment if its transport is delayed by bad roads and drifts, or cut off by the enemy? Do you, in fact, give sufficient consideration to that portion of the army which feeds the other portion?

You don't, unless you happen to have travelled with it, and been a part of it. Even the actual combatant doesn't until he

On the March

has had a spell of transport work—and then he wishes himself back with the regiment. You can't feel half that you ought for men cut off from their supplies until you have spent a few perishing nights with them on the wild bleak veldt, and learnt the true inwardness of the word HUNGER. You can't enter into the woes of the Transport Officer until you have had a few months' association with nigger drivers and South African drifts; and I can't describe them to you in mere words. These things can only be burnt into one's brain with branding-irons.

A Boer Commandant, who was taken prisoner near Pretoria, said to me one day, "Where you English have the advantage over us is in your wonderful organisation. Why, man, it used to make us shiver to see your troops marching in on us from all quarters of the compass in solid, compact bodies and perfect order. It is so different with us. We straggle along anyhow. We don't care as long as we get there. But with you—well, it *has* opened our eyes. How do you manage it?"

Nothing simpler. The General, as he turns in to his little blanket shelter at night, remarks casually to his Chief of Staff, "I think we'll move at six in the morning," and he knows that if he turns out on the stroke of that hour he will find the head of his Division or Brigade



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filed off in the direction he has previously indicated, and that in a couple or three hours' time this huge city of twinkling lights and palpitating flesh and blood will be once more gaping veldt, littered with little heaps of smouldering ashes, empty biscuit tins, bits of old harness, meat bones and feathers, and a few dead horses.

It sounds quite easy, but do you know what it involves to get this huge piece of machinery into motion, or to communicate to 20,000 men the Brigadier's casual remark about starting at six?

Take a Mounted Infantry Brigade, for the sake of example, and come out to our camp. It is night—one of those cold but exhilarating, starlight nights which you get in the Transvaal. We have dined in our great-coats by the help of some lanterns raised a few inches from the ground in order that they may shed more light on our primitive table. We are lolling round the fire now, smoking and yarning—talking shop, I am afraid.

“Any orders about moving yet, sir?” says the Adjutant.

“Not yet,” replies the Colonel, and they return to the shop for another half-hour.

An orderly steps into the fire-lit circle, and salutes.

“Here we are at last,” remarks the Colonel,



Drawn by Norman H. Hardy

Sketch by Frank Wilkinson

ABANDONED



On the March

taking the written message—"Réveille at four, stables four-thirty, breakfast at five, and march at six; baggage at six-thirty; New South Wales to furnish the right flank guard. The squadron on outpost duty to-night to act as rearguard."

This order has filtered through from the General. His mouthpiece, the A.A.G., has communicated with the various Corps Commanders, who, through their Staff Officers, have communicated with the Regimental Commanders.

The Colonel Commanding the N.S.W. Mounted Rifles initials the note; his Adjutant copies it; the orderly goes off to present it to the Officer Commanding West Australia, and from there he will go on to the Officer Commanding 6th Mounted Infantry.

The Adjutant N.S.W. Mounted Rifles proceeds to intimate to the Squadron Commanders the order of march for to-morrow—also to the Quartermaster. Squadron Commanders communicate with their Sergeant-Majors, and Sergeant-Majors with Sergeants.

The Quartermaster, who is usually Regimental Transport Officer also, sends a message to the Regimental Sergeant-Major to have the wagons inspanned by six-fifteen ready to move off at six-thirty, and the Regimental Sergeant-Major conveys the message to the "Conductor" or head of the native drivers.



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Now we can turn in comfortably. We are lucky to get the orders so early. Take half this sheepskin kaross and roll those blankets well round you. You will want them all before morning. Now turn that saddle upside down for a pillow; wind your putties round your head if you haven't got a night-cap, and you'll sleep like a dormouse. How will you wake at four o'clock, did you say? Don't bother about that; the stable picket who is on all night will give us a call. Bugles? Bless your heart, we never use them on service. In time you get so accustomed to being roused in the middle of the night, that the mere raising of the tent flap will wake you. Besides, if you are a light sleeper, you will probably hear stray horses walking about close to your head all night, and if you're not accustomed to it you will expect one of them to step on your face every other second, but don't take any notice of them. Now then, tell me when you're fixed and I'll blow out the candle. Right-o. (Puff.) Good-night!

Four o'clock a.m., pitch dark, and brutally cold.

"Time to get up, sir," says the picket. He wears his helmet over a thick sleeping-cap, which covers ears and neck—his long coat is buttoned from toes to nose.

"Go to—Hades; it can't be four yet."

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"Yes it is, sir."

Ugh! How fiendishly cold. Thank goodness I didn't undress last night. Here, I say! time to turn out. Nice bracing morning! Come and have a shower. No? Well, put your head outside the shelter and get a breath of fresh air. Yes, you're right, it is a dam shame to turn people out of bed at this ungodly hour. They don't study our personal comfort to any alarming extent. Never mind, you get used to it. Tumble out, and we'll watch the camp wake up. Here, we'll take this lantern with us. Put on a thick pair of boots; you'll find the long grass simply saturated. One second, while I get a light. Smoking before breakfast? Oh, yes. You can smoke this Transvaal tobacco at any time and all times, when you live in the open air.

We creep out into the morning, muffled like mummies. Now stand up and have a good stretch. Here we are. Look at your shelter. It is thickly coated with white frost. The horses, too, picketed in long lines, shiver and tremble under white blankets. A number of them are lying down. Having a sleep? Yes, some of them won't wake again. These cold nights, on the top of constant work and inconstant feed, play the very deuce with horse-flesh.

Behind each horse, about half a dozen paces

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distant, you will see a long frost-whitened bundle, and then a little heap consisting of saddle, bridle, nose-bag, rifle and bandolier. If you watch those long white bundles, and give them an occasional gentle kick about half way down, you will find that they double up in the centre automatically, the half nearest the saddle assuming an upright position, approximately at right angles to the other half. Why, there's something alive inside; yes, these are the troopers. Here! Get up, you lazy beggars! Don't you know *réveille* has gone some ten minutes ago?

Why don't they sleep under shelters? Well, some of them do, but the majority prefer to have all their blankets rolled round their bodies. The officers stick to the old habit, but they have improved on the early design. Originally they laced two blankets together, by means of these eyelets which you see, and stretched them across a rope held taut between two wooden uprights. They got better results by having the two blankets stitched together, and better still by closing in the ends with another blanket cut in halves.

Now come down to the wagons. The grass is awfully wet? Yes, it generally is about this time in the morning. You see, you got up before the sun. Look at these mule teams hitched up to the poles of the wagons, facing one another across a strip of canvas which

On the March

bellies in the centre. They feed out of this when there is any fodder going. When there isn't they go hungry. But they are as hard as nails. Notice how the nigger boys curl themselves up almost under their mules' hoofs. When the frost melts, those blankets of theirs ought to come out in bright reds and greens and blues. Here at the tail ends of the wagons under those tarpaulins are the white men attached to the transport. They'll wake up directly, and kick the black boys from under their bedclothes.

Now stroll back to our lines, and we'll see whether we can't raise a cup of hot coffee for you. The orderlies ought to have the fires going and kettles boiling by this time. Yes, see the fires springing up all round you. The camp is awakening. It will be time for stables directly. By the way, I hope you've brought a pannikin with you. No? Well, never mind; you won't object to taking your coffee in this mess tin. Now sit down on this water keg and make yourself comfortable. See those lights dodging about among the horses. The sub'l'tns have turned out to stables. The Adjutant is arranging for the outposts to be brought in, and a hundred other little things. The Quartermaster is pottering about superintending the issue of rations and forage. They take this sort of thing quite as a matter of course.



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Ah! Here's something that will interest you—the matutinal sick parade. See those poor chaps shivering in a little bunch round the stern of the regimental hospital van. Come this way and listen; the doctor is just ready for them.

"Now then, who's first? Well, what's the matter with you? Bad cold and pains in the head, eh? Put out your tongue" (he has already grabbed the patient's wrist). "Here, take these two pills and report again to-morrow. Next. Hallo! You back again, Smith! Put out your tongue. Ah! I thought so. Another two pills same as last. Can you ride on the wagons to-day? Yes, I suppose you must. Next, please. Well, what's up with you?" (seizing another pulse). "Let's see your tongue. Hum! How long have you been like this? Why the devil didn't you come to me before. Thought you would be all right in a day or two, did you? Well, you won't. I'll have to send you into hospital first chance. In the meantime get into my wagon. Next man"—and so on.

Come along, you've had enough of this. Take another walk down the horse lines. The men have got the blankets off, and are grooming the animals down with currycomb and brush. Now they are filling the nose-bags to a running accompaniment of plaintive

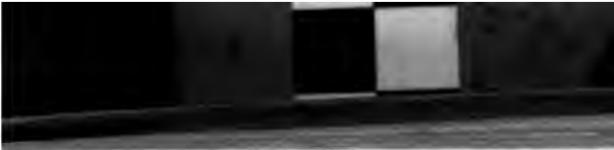


Drawn by Norman H. Hardy

Sketch by Frank Williamson

A MATUTINAL SICK PARADE





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whinnies. Poor beasts! They know it is feed time.

“Feed up!” yells the Sergeant-Major. In another two seconds the horses’ snouts are buried in oats or mealies, their ears laid back and heads down.

The Colonel, from the depths of his blankets, yells for his breakfast. “Coming, sir,” replies the orderly. You’re probably ready for something yourself by this time. Let us see what we have to offer you. Sorry we can’t give you a chair or a table. You’ll have to do the best you can on the wet grass. Stay, we’ll lay out this waterproof sheet. Now, a little porridge? Here’s some condensed milk diluted with cold water, and here’s the sugar. The stuff hasn’t been soaked overnight as it ought to be, but that’s a detail. Here, use this pannikin instead of a plate, or you’ll find that the porridge will get stone cold in two seconds. Now, will you try a bit of this steak? It will probably be a bit tough, but you see the beasts were only run in and slaughtered late last night. We think we are lucky to get fresh meat of any sort. Can’t manage it, eh? You will, after a time. However, turn your plate over and try a little biscuit and jam. Ah! Here’s some coffee. Don’t hurry; you’ve got half an hour after the regiment starts. We’ll go with the convoy to-day, just for a change.



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“Saddle up!” shouts the Sergeant-Major. The men have all finished their breakfasts. There is a little group round the Adjutant’s tent. He gulps down the last mouthful of coffee and looks at them over the candle light.

“What do you men want?”

“If you please, sir, I’m afraid my horse won’t carry me any further. He’s thoroughly done up.”

“Is he worth leading on?”

“I don’t think so, sir. He’s got an awful back, and won’t be fit to ride for a fortnight.”

“Well, you’ll have to walk then until we can find you another mount. Go to the wagons.”

“Sir, my horse got off the lines last night and strayed away,” says the next man.

“Have you looked for it?”

“Yes, sir. There’s a horse very like it, tied up in the —’s lines, but the brand on his hoofs has been rubbed out.”

“You ought to look after your horse better. Who was on stable-picket when it strayed? I’ll have to report this to the Colonel. In the meantime you must walk with the led horses.”

“Ten minutes to marching time!” roars the Sergeant-Major.

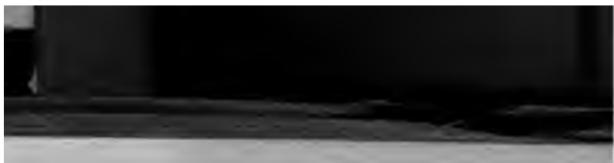
All the fit horses are saddled up. The men are strapping on their blankets and great-

On the March

coats. It is still bitterly cold, but quite light by this time. In half an hour the sun will be up and you'll begin to think that life is worth living again. Look over there to the right. Do you see that thin, snaky line winding away and finally disappearing into the blue mist beyond? That is the head of the column already under way. What time do you think those chaps had to turn out to get such a start of us? We must be near the tail end of the procession to-day.

Hallo! here's the Colonel already mounted. He rides down the lines and blows two short, sharp blasts on his whistle. Squadron commanders, interpreting the signal, yell, "Prepare to mount—mount—now then, look alive—fours right—walk march!" and the regiment files out of camp to take up its appointed place in the Brigade, all except those who have been detailed to act as flank or rearguard, and the dismounted men who are to take charge of the sick horses.

The camp begins to look like a tap-room the morning after a big drunk. The men who have been on outpost all night straggle in, looking dirty and unkempt. Officers' servants are packing the Cape carts with valises and cooking utensils. These conveyances generally go with what is known as the first line of transport—that is the ammunition and water carts, and they try to keep within easy reach



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of the regiment. They will all make a start in a few minutes.

In the meantime the heavy baggage is being packed. Mules are being inspanned. It is five minutes beyond starting-time. Suddenly the Corps Transport Officer bears down upon the Regimental Transport Officer and wants to know why the whole show is kept waiting for the N.S.W. wagons. The Brigade Transport Officer, a couple of minutes previously, had noticed a gap in the procession and asked the Corps Transport Officer what it meant. The Regimental Officer passes the word back to the Quartermaster-Sergeant, and the Quartermaster-Sergeant to the Conductor. The black boys are hustled up on to the wagons and grab handfuls of reins; others seize the bamboo whips and whirl the lashes through the air. "Phut, p-h-u-t!" they scream at the mules, and the head of the supply column moves off.



CHAPTER XX

HEIDELBERG

AFTER Diamond Hills we fell upon another period of monotonous marching and counter-marching. Finally, on June 20th—we had, ere this, been allowed an opportunity of seeing Pretoria during a half-day's halt on the outskirts—we struck south-east again, towards the Springs, a small coal-mining village connected by branch line with the trunk at Elandsfontein, where the Johannesburg line also junctions with the main. We ran into cold, miserable, wet weather, which lasted for some days. On the 22nd Ian Hamilton reached the outskirts of Heidelberg without having encountered any opposition, but as we settled down to camp that afternoon our outposts fell in with a party of Boers posted in the hills between us and the township. Hamilton immediately ordered two 5-inch guns up. They were brought into action at the back of our tents, and for an hour or so dropped lyddite and shrapnel along the

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ridges, just to let the enemy know that we were coming along behind. Under cover of a dense fog next morning an officers' patrol, under Lieutenant Newman, "C" Squadron, N.S.W. Mounted Rifles, crept out of camp and right into town without being fired upon. The bulk of the enemy had cleared out on the far side, and the stragglers were following suit. Newman took possession of a good many Mauser rifles from those of the Boers who had delayed their departure overlong.

Finding himself in the centre of this beautiful little town, and apparently quite safe, he sent word back to camp, and proceeded to fill in time by a little flag-hoisting ceremony all to himself. He found out the Landrost, stationed his troopers twelve round the flag-staff in the market square, hauled down the Transvaal flag and ran up the British ensign in quite the approved style. He hadn't a brass band with him just at the moment, so he and his men sang the National Anthem as they presented arms and saluted the flag. The townspeople—largely English-speaking—looked on and clapped enthusiastically: then they rushed into their houses and brought out everything in the shape of light refreshments which a scanty larder permitted. We had a very good time, taking it by and large.

In the meantime the whole column, under Hamilton, was gradually marching closer and

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closer to town, but just for a few hours they had other and more pressing business to attend to than public greetings, no matter how warm. The Boers had not gone very far out of town. They were, in fact, posted in the kopjes overlooking the suburban residences. The division marched though the main street to do battle with them.

Colonel De Lisle, with the Second Corps Mounted Infantry and two pom-poms under Captain Sterling, and a N.S.W. Maxim, occupied the centre of our front. The 5-inch guns opened on our right and blazed away for an hour or two, while the pom-poms crept up to closer range under cover. The Boer guns, if there were any there, did not utter a word in reply, but Mausers hiccuped fitfully all along the line of hills whenever our scouts approached the base. Following the well-established practice, we lay low for an hour to give the Artillery time, and then went for the crest of the hill with Mounted Infantry. But on this particular occasion our own men had not bargained for the dangerous nature of the ground over which they were about to gallop. Those native cat-holes did us infinitely more damage than the Boer rifle-fire. Captain Hilliard, riding at the head of "C" Squadron, went down with a whack which completely stunned him for the time, especially as the horse proceeded to roll over his prostrate

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form. Several others came terrific "crop-pers," which dislocated shoulder-blades, sprained ankles and wrists, and did all sorts of inconvenient things. General Hamilton himself was brought to earth with a fractured shoulder-blade, which incapacitated him for much more work that day. The N.S.W. ambulance wagons, not having a chance of gathering in wounded generals every day, dashed gaily into the fighting line and collected their distinguished patient.

In the meantime, to the right of us, Roberts's Horse were subjected to a hot fire from the tops of the hill. Five officers were struck more or less badly. But the position was carried and the Boers were soon in full flight towards the next chain of kopjes in their rear. The 6th Mounted Infantry were sent on by Colonel De Lisle to have a look at the position, but they came back shortly afterwards with the news that the Boers were laagered strongly on the other side. We did not pursue the matter further that day, or the next, or even the next. The N.S.W. Regiment was left out on the hills as an advanced outpost, while the rest of the column retired and sat down just outside the township of Heidelberg.

It was here or hereabouts that we burnt our boats—or rather our Cape carts—behind us. Now, at no other stage of the campaign

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could the military authorities have more effectually disheartened our Australian troops. We had been for several months cut off from postal communication with the outside world. Other regiments and units had managed to get their letters once in a way: we could get none. We had been denied admission to big towns like Johannesburg and Pretoria on the plea that we were wanted elsewhere. No one seemed to know exactly where we were, and the postal authorities least of all. A large number of our men had been under the impression that the taking of Pretoria meant practically the conclusion of the war, and they were looking forward eagerly to getting back home to their farms and their friends. They had been shifted about from pillar to post without any reason which appeared on the surface; and now, to crown all, came a sudden order that their Cape carts, with the exception of one per regiment, were to be left behind.

On the face of it this would not appear to the outsider as much of a calamity, but you don't realise all that it involved. Cape carts, as a matter of fact, had by this time become an essential feature of our transport. To the best of my knowledge they were introduced into the regiment very early in the campaign, at Prieska, when the Mounted Rifles took possession of that town. They

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were used then to carry officers' baggage, and in so far as they relieved the wagons of this impedimenta, they were a distinct acquisition. They could go over ground which wagon-drivers would not look at, and consequently they were more frequently close up with the column. This is important in cold weather when you want all the blankets you can get at night. Up to a certain point, therefore, they proved exceptionally useful, inasmuch as they relieved the mule wagons of a good deal of dead-weight, and saved our men much privation. Before the adoption of this sensible method of transport we frequently spent two and three consecutive nights on the bleak veldt, shivering with cold and pinched with hunger, swearing volubly at those wagons which never seemed to be able to keep up with us.

But, like most good things, this Cape cart idea was carried to a degree verging on the absurd. Instead of one per squadron, the number grew to two and three in some cases. Then the sergeants managed to get one between them—for which they gave a receipt, of course—and so the number swelled to such proportions that the line of carts standing at a drift waiting their turn to cross resembled very strongly a cab or 'bus rank in a busy thoroughfare. But the thing

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had been allowed to go on so long without comment from the transport officers that we didn't anticipate any danger of interference at this stage.

However, one night near Heidelberg our Brigadier issued an order to the effect that in future only one cart per unit would be allowed with the column. This meant either wholesale destruction or abandonment. We argued that our regiment consisted of three distinct units—and so it did in theory. We had one lot of Mounted Rifles, one of Mounted Infantry—the second contingent—and one of infantry mounted. Ridley saw the ingenuity of the suggestion, but missed the real point. No, we might only retain one per regiment. All the gear we carried in Cape carts must go back to the wagons, every suggestion to the contrary notwithstanding.

Oh, how we grumbled that night! We were rankly insubordinate and rebellious. Not that we couldn't get along without the carts; but why dock them so late in the campaign? The Officer Commanding went to the Corps Commander, and the Corps Commander to the Brigadier. It was no go. The carts must stop behind. Very well, if that is the final verdict nobody else shall have them, we said; and here a brilliant idea struck one of the officers. We



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would make a huge bonfire of the condemned carts and let the column see that we didn't care two straws. Accordingly several vehicles were piled high in the air, and a fire-stick was solemnly placed under the lot. You might have seen the blaze for miles round. The regiment took a grim pleasure in keeping the flames well fed. Cart after cart was wheeled up and shoved in without a word. It looked like wanton destruction; but *something* had to go that night. Better that than open mutiny. So when the last vehicle had been consigned to its doom the whole regiment marched round in single file, officers leading, chanting a solemn dirge to a slow, funeral step.

That was *our* way of relieving our pent-up feelings. I don't know of any other lot of men who would have done the thing so dramatically.

Next morning the order was rescinded to this extent, that we were to be allowed three Cape carts per regiment instead of one. It was then too late to repair the damage and we didn't appreciate the concession.



Drawn by Norman H. Hardy

Sketch by Frank Wilkinson

THE INCANTATION

Australia at the Front!

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CHAPTER XXI

EXTRACT FROM MY DIARY

“HEIDELBERG, *Sunday, June 24th.*—Regiment is resting to-day on spot where yesterday's fight finished up. Officers have taken up quarters in cottage until recently occupied by manager of Western Molineux Mine. Suppose next people who come along this way will arrive at conclusion that we turned place inside out, but, as matter of fact, Provost-Marshal had been there ahead of us. It was he who disarranged the furniture and emptied chests of drawers on floor. Rooms looked as though burglars had been through place. Managed to clear sufficient floor space to lay down our bed valises. After all, prefer open veldt to stuffy rooms. Regimental barber is shaving the officers in turn on front verandah—or rather ‘stoep.’ Can't get accustomed to these Dutch words yet. One squadron is on outpost duty; rest of regiment is getting ready for mail, which is to be collected this afternoon.

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"By the way, somebody ought to suggest to War Office advisability of appointing a 'Soldiers' Letter Censor.' Tommy gets too much of start in race home with news from the front. His letters, endorsed 'On active service; no stamps available,' are probably well on their way to Cape Town while mere professional correspondents are chasing round country for Press Censor. Nearest available is at Pretoria—four or five days' journey each way. If I weren't lost or captured or starved *en route* I should get back here only to find that regiment had moved on to Frankfort, or some other town scores of miles away. It's a heartbreaking game trying to pick up a column when you have dropped back even one day, but eight or ten!—you would never see it again. Spoke to Lord Stanley about this when I left Pretoria with Ian Hamilton's column. He said an officer had been appointed to censor telegrams from correspondents with Hamilton, but afraid that all press letters must go through his (Lord Stanley's) hands as usual. It was contrary to regulations and all that sort of thing. Good old rules and regulations! Good old military system! Amusing part of it is that he doesn't read your letters for Australia. In accordance with printed 'Rules for Correspondents,' letters to newspapers outside South Africa 'will be delivered closed to the

Extract from My Diary

Press Censor. He will not open the envelopes, but he will initial them and they will be passed intact to their destinations.' Even this was distinct concession, dating from arrival at front of Lord Roberts. Previously all our letters were most carefully edited by Major Streatfield, the Censor with Methuen's column. Even private letters from correspondents were handed in unsealed. Believe this was due to fact that one or two outsiders had been detected writing uncensored letters to friends with view to publication. Hence more recent rule, 'Any correspondent detected writing uncensored letters to friends in the Colony, with a view to their being published, will have his license cancelled.' Must do Major Streatfield justice, however, of admitting that he would generally take your word that private letters were actually private letters.

"Tommy, therefore, without any rules and regulations, gets ahead of us every time, and with a little ingenuity he can generally manage to make our letters read as the merest of unimaginative drivel. Some specimens of his work have come back to us by recent mails. Read this:—

"Following is an extract from a letter to his mother received from Lance-Corporal —, who went out with the second contingent:—
'Since leaving Cape Town we have had thirty

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days and nights in the train; then 180 miles by road as escort to the convoy, and then another 100 to this place. We have seen all the fighting and been in all the battles that the British have won. One day we were out and the bullets were buzzing round our heads like bees, but we don't take any notice of them now. We have got quite accustomed to it. One went so close to my nose that I had to shut my eyes. The fellow alongside me got two bullets through his helmet and four through his body. Then another hit him in the forehead and he began to sing "A little bit off the top." He is walking about now well and hearty. I never feel better or happier than when the bullets are flying.'

"And this.

"Sergeant _____, writing to friends at C_____, says:—'We are having a hot time now. Things are humming after our long stay at Enslin. But fever is very prevalent. I had a narrow squeak at Spion Kop the other day. A bullet passed through my helmet and another hit the ground just in front of me. I put two stones together to lie behind, and had just got settled when another bullet hit the top one and turned it completely round. It is not the Boers we have to fight so much as the country. We have to sleep in trenches at night, with one



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eye on the enemy and the other on the lions and tigers which are very prevalent here. We are having some excellent sport, but I don't know whether I shall be able to bring any skins home owing to the trouble of carrying them about.' (We paraded this ingenious non-com. before the regiment one morning and read his letter out aloud. He explained that he had not intended it for publication and was let off with a caution.)

"But the man who is lying on his back in hospital can give the rest of them a good many points when it comes to descriptive narratives of fights. Here is one sample:—

“Our company was sent out as a firing line. We trotted off over some heavy ploughed ground under a murderous fire. Then the shells started to drop all round us and in between our horses' legs, so we broke into a gallop. Eight pom-pom shells burst right in among us but did no damage. We were then ordered out into the flat, and as soon as the Boers saw that we meant business their bullets began to tear up the ground in fine style. We still had 800 yards to run. Every time we heard the pom-pom boom we dropped flat on our faces and the shells passed safely overhead. Then we gave them what for. They scooted out of their holes as we rushed up, galloped up to another kopje and

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commenced on us afresh. It was great. The General told us after it was all over that we did exactly what he intended us to do, and that the only reason why we had not lost a single man or horse in the engagement was because of our pluck and determination.'

"I was talking to a Dragoon Guardsman one day about Australians. He said: 'They are decent enough fellows, but such beggars to blow!' I wonder whether he had seen any of these letters.

"One man I notice rather gives the show away as far as some of his comrades are concerned. He writes to say that he hasn't fired a shot or seen a shot fired since the commencement of the campaign. 'We are still stranded here—two months, and nearly three, since leaving Orange River. You can judge of our feelings. Nearly five months away and we have not seen a shot fired or fired one ourselves. From what I can see we are an ornament here in South Africa. We are without warm clothing or boots, and without a change of any description, and have to do garrison duty three or four hundred miles from the fighting lines. The officers have to grin and bear it, but all the same they are disgusted with the whole show. I think it is about up to the Government to provide us with warm clothing because it is deuced cold here after the sun sets. If you



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write, let me know if the war is still on. I will bet you drinks the people in Australia don't know where we are.'

"This is the burden of his complaint, and he objects to it being represented otherwise. I understand that the Battery to which he belongs has instituted sort of drum-head court-martial by way of 'dealing it out' to those of their number who go into action without the knowledge and consent of their comrades. One of the most flagrant cases yet discovered was that of a driver who wrote to a lady in Australia giving a vivid account of his experiences round about Ladysmith and Modder River (before he had arrived in the country). He was asked to answer charges something to the following effect:—(1) Being through the siege of Ladysmith without the rest of the Battery and without leave. (2) Being under fire at Magersfontein and having his horse shot without leave. (3) Writing a letter to one Miss _____ with intent to mislead. (4) Stating therein that the shells were bursting round and over the Battery without anyone being shot. (5) Making the Battery appear ridiculous in the eyes of the public of Australia.

"He was sentenced, so I am told, to a tossing in a horse blanket, a sousing in the river, and ordered to wear an emblem representing the V.C. for being the champion liar of the

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Battery. The sentence of the Court was duly carried out.

"After the Diamond Hills fight, and while still encamped at Zwarelpoort, I decided to run in to Pretoria with a Press letter. Unless I got the Censor's stamp on the back of the envelope it would, of course, be stopped in Cape Town, and the further we moved away from Pretoria the more trouble I should have in reaching headquarters. Father Patrick, our regimental chaplain, who stuck to us through thick and thin, seemed inclined to come in with me, so we drove instead of riding, and allowed ourselves what we calculated would be ample time to get back before the regiment moved on. We found our way into town, and the horses, after that fourteen-mile pull, were still fairly fresh. They were fed and watered while we hunted round for the Censor's office and made a few purchases in town. This consumed quite two hours, but it was now only three o'clock, and we ought to make camp again before dark. So we should but for circumstances over which we had no control. While we were looking for the Censor our column was getting under way for another long march.

"We drove on and on and on, reached the spot from which we had started at dusk, and found it deserted. At the time we came to the conclusion that we must have missed our



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way, but we were miles and miles from anywhere in particular, and no sign of life within sight. Night closed down as we groped our way across country looking for another track. The horses, dead beat by this time, had to be flogged every inch of the way. Finally, in negotiating some rough boulders, the pole of our buggy snapped and—there we were! stranded on the open veldt without blankets or water or horse-feed, and no prospect of being able to push on even when day broke. But we had twelve hours of intense cold to look forward to in the meantime, and that was sufficiently appalling for the present. We outspanned and prepared to camp—picketed the tired horses in a patch of decent grass and gave them enough rope to graze round for ten or twelve yards. They ate circles round their pegs down to the bare veldt, and then we moved them on to fresh spots. We had nothing better to offer them. As for ourselves, we had a big supply of tinned meat aboard, purchased in Pretoria, but no tin-opener and no cooking-gear. You see we had reckoned on getting our evening meal in camp. We couldn't light a fire because we had no firewood, and in the pitch darkness it was unsafe to wander out of sight of the buggy in search of it.

“So we hacked open a tin of bully-beef and

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stayed the pangs of hunger with that. Then we turned in under the buggy and covered ourselves up with newspapers, which we had obtained in town. Now newspapers, if you know how to manage them, make fairly decent bed-quilts. The confirmed loafer who sleeps out regularly in our big domains or public parks in Sydney, seldom uses anything else, even in the middle of winter: it is so easily carried about under one's arm in the daytime, and so cheap. But Father Patrick and I had not previously had much experience of this sort of thing, and we couldn't manage those papers anyhow. We simply lay and shivered all night on the bare ground and let the bed-quilt go in sheer despair. Of course there was a hard frost in the night; there always is when you haven't got blankets.

"Long before daylight we were stamping up and down in a vain endeavour to feel our feet and decide what was best to be done under the circumstances. One of us must certainly go off on foot in search of assistance; both could not leave without risk of losing the whole turn-out, to say nothing of about £15 worth of stores which we had packed in the well of the buggy. Which one must go, and which direction should he take? How would he be able to find his way back, even if he struck the column and was able to procure assistance? How could we get

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along with a broken pole, even if we had fresh horses that would pull? And how was one to know in which direction the column had gone?

"These were a few of the questions we were trying to decide when a remarkable thing happened. I called it a piece of unheard-of luck. Father Patrick thought it was a dispensation of Providence. You would never guess what it was. . . . With the first streaks of dawn there appeared in the distance a solitary horse, grazing through the wet grass. It wandered nearer and nearer; why, it was actually saddled and bridled! The bridle trailed on the ground and got foul of his forelegs. Surely here was the solution of the whole difficulty. I took possession of what the gods had sent so opportunely. It was a poor old Argentine that had seen its best days, but it would be quite equal to the task of carrying me until I could reach our camp. Father Patrick resigned himself to the inevitable and mounted guard over the buggy while I mounted the horse. He didn't altogether like the idea of commandeering a strange animal. He said I should inevitably be stuck upon the road and get into further trouble; for the saddle was branded with an 'A.S.C.' (Army Service Corps), and the horse wore a broad arrow on his neck. It turned out as he had prognosti-

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cated. About six miles out on the road I came to a drift where a column was crossing, and sure enough I was haled up. My tale must have sounded awfully thin, now I come to think of it; but he lent me the horse to go on with. I promised to return it. Well, I went on for another ten miles; and finally, having passed every camp but our own, reached home. Lieutenant M'Glinn, the Quartermaster, fixed me up. He sent the regimental wheelwright back with me to mend the broken pole; also two men, with a couple of spare mules, to bring the cart back. We found the Padre sitting disconsolately against the wheel as we came up.

"All this trouble and worry and hardship just to get Lord Stanley's stamp on the back of a Press letter which he never reads! This sort of thing, with slight variations, happened all through the campaign. Generally one rode back to headquarters instead of driving, and very often got down to the last biscuit many miles away from home. If only the authorities had been able to look a little further ahead they might have seen the absurdity of the system from quite another point of view—they might have realised the possibility of our despatches falling into the hands of the enemy during these long, lonely rides of ours. Even letters to Australia some-



Drawn by Norman H. Hardy

Sketch by Frank Wilkinson

THE LAST BISCUIT

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times contained news which would be of use to the enemy ; but, to be sure, our friends on the Boer side generally found out what our troops were about as soon as they wanted the information."

CHAPTER XXII

MAINLY PERSONAL

To Lord Roberts, of course, I take off my hat. He is the incarnation of everything that the soldier looks for in a leader. When things wear their most sombre aspect—when Tommy is badgered about from pillar to post, sent here and there and back again without the slightest inkling of what it all means, and everything seems to be going quite wrong—he comforts himself with the reflection that “Bobs knows what he is doing, and everything will come right in the end.” I think this just about sums up the situation. The “little man” possesses the entire confidence of his vast army, and no general of modern times has better deserved its love and admiration; certainly no commander has been more willingly served. We Australians owe him a deep debt of gratitude. He was the first to openly recognise us as useful allies. He made life tolerable for us in South Africa.

When “Bobs” and Kitchener first went up

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to the front to take active command of the western force the most complete precautions were taken against an accident by the way. At this time a good deal of covert rebellion existed among farmers residing along the railway line between Cape Town and De Aar. We had troops stationed at intervals alongside the permanent way between these two places, but it would have required an Army Corps or two to patrol the whole length. Hence one never knew what might happen. A special train was put on, ostensibly for the Commander-in-Chief and his staff, and it was timed to start just ahead of the ordinary mail train which leaves Cape Town every night at nine o'clock. Thousands of people flocked down to the station to see "Bobs" off to the front. The car blinds were drawn; Staff officers rushed hither and thither full of importance; but no sign of "Bobs." The engine-driver leaned over his cab, watching for the signal to start, and everybody wondered why the "little man" was so late. Then the traffic manager rushed forward and demanded why in thunder the train was being kept waiting. The conductor said he had been holding back for Lord Roberts. "Why, he's aboard," said the traffic manager. "Oh, I didn't see him come, sir," replied the conductor; "if you say it's all right we'll start at once." "Of course it's all right," snapped

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his superior ; and the train steamed out from the platform.

"What a sell!" remarked the funny man in the crowd ; "Bobs has been in the carriage all the time." So it appeared. It was a very crestfallen crowd that now began to disperse. No one paid any attention to the ordinary mail train ; but the traffic manager got aboard it and he was still somewhat excited. Arriving at Salt River Station, a few miles out of Cape Town, he alighted and went forward towards the engine. **Something was evidently wrong**, for soon he and the driver were engaged in a warm altercation. The few stragglers on the platform, who had collected to see the "special" go through, crowded round to see the fun. At one time it looked as though they would come to blows ; and just at the most interesting stage in the proceedings Roberts and Kitchener, both in mufti, calmly sailed into the station and entered a reserved car, the blinds of which had previously been drawn. Not a soul on the platform noticed the distinguished pair ; but it was a significant fact that, immediately they were comfortably inside, the altercation near the engine suddenly collapsed, and the train went on its way north as though nothing had happened. It had all been most elaborately thought out. Right along the line, at every station, crowds assembled to

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see the "special" go through "with Lord Roberts aboard," and very few took any notice of the train by which he was actually travelling.

When Lady Roberts travelled from Bloemfontein to join her husband at Pretoria, similar precautions against accident were taken, except that an armoured train, instead of a special, preceded the ordinary mail.

Of Kitchener I know comparatively little, and should hesitate to talk about his work, even if I knew considerably more. To my mind he is chiefly remarkable on account of his unlikeness to his published portraits. He is tall, slightly stooping, and quite fair as to complexion—not the jet-black-moustached person one sees in shop window photographs. He looks out at you from under prominent eyebrows, with a now-then-none-of-your-nonsense sort of expression which is sometimes a trifle disconcerting. Altogether he is the type of man you would go out of your way to avoid in a narrow passage if he had a grudge against you.

I came across Kipling, in khaki, at Karee, under rather curious conditions. I knew he was in South Africa, but until this particular day had never seen him. He had come out from Bloemfontein with Bennet Burleigh of the London *Daily Telegraph* to see a fight.

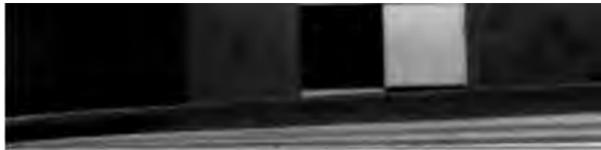
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I was deeply interested at the time in watching the advance of the N.S.W. Mounted Rifles upon the Boer position, under a heavy rifle fire, and suddenly turned round to find two figures sitting on ant-heaps close alongside. The one I recognised as Burleigh, and the other I guessed to be Kipling. Bullets occasionally flew over in our direction, but the Boer fire at this time was concentrated on the fellows in the valley below us. Kipling crouched down under his ant-heap and peered through his binoculars. It was his first time under fire. Every time I took a glance in his direction he was either lighting or relighting a little briar pipe which he had forgotten to refill in his excitement. He talked and talked without cessation, until suddenly a shell screeched over our heads and burst some distance in rear.

"Good God!" ejaculated Burleigh, levelling his glasses at the spot from which the flash sprang, "I thought those were our guns over there."

The pair started off for the rear as more Boer guns opened fire, and they were just in time. A shell dropped behind the ant-heap Kipling had quitted barely a minute after he had gone. He saw his first, and very nearly his last, fight.

One of the first men I met when we entered Kimberley was Cecil Rhodes, who



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was then staying at the Sanatorium. He is a most interesting person to meet, but not quite so young and athletic in appearance as I had imagined. Practically he saved Kimberley. His was the guiding hand in most of the schemes set on foot for its protection. The construction of the "Long Cecil" at De Beers's works was one of the feats of the campaign.

Among the commanding generals in the field I always regarded Tucker as the most interesting—largely because he was so unexpected. You never knew what he would do under any given set of circumstances. He had a most complete vocabulary of language, more or less forcible—generally more than less. He once placed a couple of correspondents under open arrest for daring to witness a fight without his permission, although they had general passes from Lord Roberts's Chief Press Censor to go anywhere and see anything. General Pole-Carew also had a way of taking things into his own hands, which one couldn't but admire. At Kroonstadt he commandeered an hotel big enough to accommodate something like 100 guests for the special use of himself and a small staff. Sentries were placed at the doors and no one admitted without an order. He took an inventory of all the liquor on the premises and doled it out, through his Provost-Marshal, to

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officers commanding regiments, in homeopathic doses, at prices which he himself fixed. When the landlord rose in righteous wrath at this usurpation or functions his keys were taken away and the staff proceeded to "run" el. By degrees he came to resign himself to the inevitable and begged to be allowed to resume control over his own affairs. In the General's point of view there is this to be said, that the landlord began by trying to squeeze too much out of a tired and thirsty army. On the other hand, such prices were fixed upon his stock of liquids as could not have brought him in anything like a fair return on his outlay. I was staying at the same hotel during the whole time that this little comedy was being enacted, and the landlord showed me all his books by way of demonstrating the injustice of the thing. By a fluke I had engaged a room there before the place was commandeered, and I objected so strongly to being turned out that they finally allowed me to remain.

General Ian Hamilton, to my mind, was the most charming of all divisional commanders. Almost courtly in his bearing to all, whether commissioned or not, he won the love and admiration of our Australian troops without an apparent effort. We saw a good deal more of him than any other general on the field, and he trusted us in positions which needed both



Mainly Personal

grit and circumspection. Colonel de Lisle, our Corps Commander, struck me as an ideal Mounted Infantry leader. He believed implicitly in this branch of the service, and lost no chance of showing it off by brilliant and dashing movements which usually "came off." Unfortunately, from our point of view, he was an Imperial officer—a Durham Light Infantry man—and half his corps or thereabouts was made up of Imperial Mounted Infantry, who were frequently accorded a good deal of credit which should have gone to the Colonials. Rightly or wrongly, we Australians feel that we should have had a chance, as a Brigade, under a Colonial Brigadier, on the same principle that General Brabant commanded Brabant's Horse. But here arises the difficulty. Early in the preliminary negotiations, before Australia had actually sent troops to the front, Mr Chamberlain instructed us not to despatch any officers over the rank of major with the contingent. So great, however, was the scramble for appointments to the South African force that colonels sunk their rank in order to secure places, either as Special Service or Regimental officers. Captains and brevet-majors did duty as junior subalterns, and subalterns went as sergeants. Thus it happened that when an Australian Brigade was talked of at Bloemfontein, we had no officers of sufficiently high rank to take com-

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mand, and the Imperial Government could not make any promotions or reinstatements without the formal approval of the Colonial Government. *Caratta* notices containing such promotions about the to the office of pay, too treated over between or ments. M lous straits as . . . al consequence. But worse than this was the unceremonious way in which our Special Service officers were treated at the base. True, it was largely due to neglect on the part of our Government to properly accredit them. The fact remains, however, that they were treated very much as military adventurers, and found great difficulty in getting employment of any sort at the front. Later, when they began to be recognised at their true value, their services were at a premium. In no place did they prove more useful than as Intelligence officers.

Can anybody say why the average British Intelligence Officer is usually the least intelligent of his tribe, and why he so frequently wears an eyeglass? We "gave it up" very early in the campaign, but as time wore on we accustomed ourselves to the combination, and then we knew why the intelligence work



Drawn by Norman H. Hardy

Sketch by Frank Wilkinson

TWO TYPES: IMPERIAL, AND COLONIAL, INTELLIGENCE OFFICER

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To face page 100



Mainly Personal

came to be done so indifferently. Until we had marched through a district we found it impossible to obtain maps of it at all reliable, and until we stumbled against some Boer Commandant we hadn't the smallest idea of his position or strength. Colonial officers, and especially South Africans, could have done much for the army in this department if they had not been so frequently hampered by orders from boys with commissions and pedigrees and nothing else. Not that the British officer—even the eyeglassed variety—lacks courage. During the whole campaign I have never seen a case of "funk" on his part. What he lacks in bush warfare is the thing we call "nouse." You can take him out and lose him so easily. I remember the case of a British subaltern who was sent on outpost duty with half a dozen men to watch a particular farmhouse. He had to get the owner of the farm to show him the way back to camp. Then the British Transport Officer, who "knows his position," will never think of taking advice from a common or garden Colonial who happens to know the country through which he is travelling. He will get his wagons hopelessly stuck in an impossible drift, rather than go round by an easier route which has been suggested to him. Then when the worst has befallen him, he will turn on the presumptuous Colonial with an

Australia at the Front

aggrieved expression and a can't-you-suggest-any-way-out-of-the-difficulty air which is quite too pathetic.

Among ~~titled personages~~ at the front—and in a big camp, fifty yards necessarily and Prince entirely with the "side." I like any junior, and into the ~~way~~ army, of good fellows round a camp fire. Sir Ashmead Bartlett, who dodged about here, there, and everywhere, afforded some of us a good deal of amusement by the kid-gloved way in which he followed up the movements of the army, but he was as keen as mustard in a fight, and bursting with energy.

We had a few titles scattered here and there among the big army of correspondents, and a fair proportion of Australians—many of them acting for London newspapers. M. H. Donohoe, of the London *Chronicle*, A. G. Hales, of the *Daily News*, and Mortimer Mempes, one of *Black and White's* staff of artists, are cases in point. Those of us who represented Australian papers had not, on the whole, too rosy a time of it. Donald MacDonald, a brilliant Melbourne man, was shut up in Ladysmith during the siege, and went

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home immediately afterwards completely broken down. W. J. Lambie, as before stated, was killed near Rensburg. H. H. Spooner, of the Sydney *Evening News*, died of enteric at Deelfontein. We left him behind at Bloemfontein on May 1st, and never saw him again. He was one of the "whitest" men Australia sent out—a most generous, open-handed fellow, the staunchest of friends, and the most honourable of colleagues. Major Reay, a Victorian, went back home from Bloemfontein invalidated before the general advance north took place, and the representative of the New Zealand Press Association went down with fever at Arundel very much earlier than this. No, unfortunately our correspondents did not bear the charmed lives of the rank and file.

Among Special Service officers we have to deplore the deaths of Colonel Umphelby, a Victorian, and "one of the best"; also Lieutenant Grieve, one of the most promising of the younger generation of New South Wales officers. Major Bridges (New South Wales) and Captain Johnston (Victoria), both leading Colonial artillerists, were invalidated home after some months of useful work with Imperial batteries.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE MODERN CORRESPONDENT

It seems to me, as the result of a year's campaigning with the British Army—and coming to it fresh from constant association with Australian troops—that the game of war corresponding, before it will be worth playing as a career, ought to be hedged round by quite a new set of rules. The correspondent's position and status in the field ought to be more clearly defined. In America they manage things quite differently. Your Yankee newspaper man, if he isn't actually "running" the campaign, is hobnobbing with commanding generals, and advising them what to do. He flatters himself that he is making history, and not merely recording it. We had several of this type in South Africa—men who had come over fresh from Cuba and the Philippines—and it took them quite a long time to accustom themselves to the altered circumstances. They found it somewhat difficult even to "get acquainted," as

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they put it, with "minor British generals"; and one of them—by far the most brilliant of his particular school—went over in disgust to the other side, and became strongly pro-Boer.

Another American, whom I knew well, laboured long under the impression that British officers were willing, and even anxious, to assist correspondents in their work. He preferred to deal at first hand with generals, if they were handy. He wouldn't bother with a major if there were a colonel about. When roused to resentment by some more than ordinarily obvious snub, he would reverse this process, and address generals as "colonel," and colonels as "major." It was generally a most effective form of repartee, especially when he had reduced the scale of military rank as far as "sergeant." One day he was brusquely stopped by a major-general as he rode quietly along the road.

"Look here, Colonel," he remonstrated, "I'm an *Amurcan*, and used to being treated civilly."

"I don't care what you are used to; you can't go any farther along this road."

"But, Major, can you tell me by what right—"

"No, I can't tell you anything. Get out of this."

"But I want to know, Captain—"

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"Look here, sir, if you don't clear out, I'll have you placed under arrest."

"You can do what you like with me, Sergeant-Major. I'm an American citizen, even in Sou

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Among the correspondents you may find three or four who possess the American's aggressiveness. They are generally titled personages who go out at their own expense for the experience which they are likely to get, and not because they know anything of journalism. The average untitled correspondent has yet a good deal of leeway to make up in this respect. His work is arduous, and to some extent responsible, and he has to fight the whole of the British Army system into the bargain. When the column has settled down to rest for the night after a big battle, he has to set to work to find the Press Censor and get his message off; and Censors, if they know their business, hide themselves away when they are likely to be wanted. After this, unless he has a despatch rider in his employ, your correspondent has to ride back to the nearest

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telegraph office, running the risk of losing his way or losing the column on his return. All of which he does, more or less cheerfully, for a few pounds a week and his expenses. He lives no better than the average subaltern on service, and gets over twenty times as much ground. And yet every obstacle that an ingenious War Office system can devise is placed in his way. Under Methuen he was not allowed to cross the road without a pass signed by the Press Censor, or write a letter to his wife without it being read, lest something of it should find its way into print. Under Lord Roberts, he was treated with courteous toleration.

And every campaign he runs an equal, if not greater, risk of death by bullet or disease than the average soldier. When he has been through half a dozen and come out alive, what wonder that he finds himself unfitted for the humdrum of everyday journalism. Then in sheer desperation he takes to the lecture platform, and ever afterwards selects his material with an eye to public audiences. If he is not an artist, he buys a camera and takes it to the front. There he stays, just long enough to exhaust what he conceives to be the "sensations" of the campaign, and slips back to London so that he may strike the lecturing market while it booms. He knows from experience that there will be a

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slump immediately the war is over and all those other low correspondents begin to tell the public of their experiences.

He scrambles on to the first disengaged platform at the limelight. "Ahem! Gentlemen. Tonight I am going to show you a series of the fanciful in Fleet Street, connected with the general war yet furnished I am going to show you a series of hot pictures—not by special artists photographs taken on the field of battle, many of them under very heavy fire, as you will notice. They speak for themselves. You know that the camera cannot lie."

In other words, all subsequent accounts may safely be regarded as base and weak imitations.

Then the special artist comes back, filled with the supremest contempt for these wretched camera fiends, and he also stands under the limelight before a large audience. "Ladies and gentlemen, you have been told—or rather the general public—or perhaps I should say that small section of the public which attended the somewhat premature lectures delivered by a contemporary—that the camera cannot lie. Ladies and gentlemen, it all depends on the man behind the camera—the man who presses the button.

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To-night I am going to show you that these 'snapshots-under-fire' are, from first to last, pure, concentrated, unadulterated 'fake.' I shall show you how easy a matter it is for an unprincipled person to juggle with his camera, doctor his negatives, and gull you—yes, I mean it, ladies and gentlemen. I am only an artist myself, and I don't profess to do more than reproduce on paper the principal incidents of the campaign as they presented themselves to me, but I can safely affirm that every picture which I shall show you has either been drawn on the spot from life or from sketches supplied to me by other people who were there. I leave it to you to decide which you prefer—honest impressions or bare-faced frauds."

While the general public is still scratching its poor head over this problem, the veteran who doesn't either photograph or sketch returns from the front and takes the floor. To all that his predecessors have advanced on this point he replies "Rats"—of course with some little circumlocution. "I, ladies and gentlemen, had been campaigning for years before either the special artist or the special photographer were thought of seriously, and I can assure you that neither is above suspicion of fraud. In these modern wars you cannot get close enough to the fight to do any good with a camera, and a mere pencil

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is powerless to reproduce the local colour. While the snapshottist is fiddling about with his focussing apparatus and running round his subject so as to get between it and the sun, the artist is sharpening his pencil and wondering what he shall put in his picture and what he shall leave out, and by the time both men are ready for action their subject has disappeared. You may take it from an old veteran, ladies and gentlemen, that the only way to do a modern fight is to ride about the field, see all that there is to be seen, make your notes on the spot, and write your account while the whole thing is fresh in your memory."

Between the three, your man in the street doesn't know which to believe. He wants disinterested advice on the subject, and as this campaign is not my fourth nor fifth, but my very first, I not unnaturally feel that I am the person to give it. I should unhesitatingly say, "Don't believe a single one of us ; we are all lying to you more or less—some more, others considerably less. The snapshottist, under fire, deceives you in a negative sort of way—if I may be pardoned the expression—because he puts his own interpretation on what the camera has seen, and you know it is a very easy thing for some photographers to mistake a picture taken under peaceful, favourable conditions, for a real

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battle scene. The negatives *will* get mixed up, no matter how careful you may be, and sometimes it happens that a picture, say of the battle of Blankfontein, slips into the paper before the photographer finds out that after all it ought to have been labelled "The Royal Russets at Robinsonsfontein ; showing how they would storm a kopje if they had a chance." Of course by this time it is too late to repair the mistake, besides it would only cause unnecessary comment—and, after all, the public doesn't like to be undeceived in matters of this sort.

I would go on to explain to my friend in the street—if he hadn't already had quite enough of the subject—how much easier it is with modern weapons to take a person's life at 1000 yards than his photograph at 1000 feet. It is all a matter of range, and in this respect the camera is no match for the Mauser, nor the cinematograph for the pom-pom—that, in fact, the photographer hasn't been able to keep pace with the slaughterer. I would suggest to him the difficulty in the way of snapping invisible moving objects at 1500 yards' range, without an instantaneous telephoto lens, a focal-plane shutter, and a Röntgen ray apparatus all rolled into one. I would tell him gently that, so long as he asked for and insisted upon the impossible in photography, these "special

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snapshotists" would go on supplying it, and proceed to give him examples of the frauds to which he lent his countenance.

Then I would take him into the nearest hotel and buy him a drink, just to fortify him against what I had to say about the "special artist." I would reach for an illustrated paper, and show him how hopeless it had become for even the camera to compete with the brush, when they could publish in London such artistic drawings of battles fought in the Transvaal within two or three days of the actual engagement. I would show him how horribly unpicturesque the real thing was as compared with illustrated journalism, and try to explain to him how necessary it was to put in puffs of smoke, so as to break up solid masses, and indicate the position of the enemy, and how impossible to make certain pictures "compose" without a bursting shell or two in the foreground. Then, if he were not by this time absolutely bored to extinction, I would proceed something like this:—But you must remember, in fairness to the artist, that he does not profess to give you a photographic reproduction of any particular scene. He would rather die if he were any sort of an artist at all. He is all his life trying to learn what to leave out; his artistic soul positively loathes the canvas or paper blistered all over with mere facts. His place is to make a

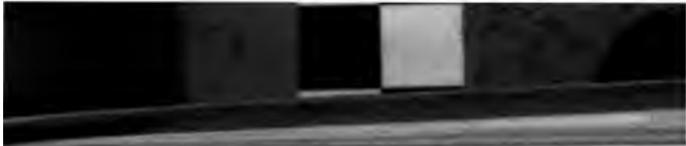
The Modern Correspondent

selection from those facts, and give you his impression of one. And most people who know anything about art prefer a good artist's impression to the best photograph. If only the "special artist" would stick to that! But picturesque incidents are so few and far between, and battles extend over such a distressingly large area nowadays, and, in short, the ordinary mortal often finds himself, with the best intentions in the world, unable to watch the whole field of action. But the illustrated paper editor wants something more than a truthful impression. He thinks that you, the general public, want blood and thunder, and he will give it you at any cost. If his man at the front won't send sensational stuff back, well, it can be done in Fleet Street without the slightest trouble. Your modern editor will hand over a paragraph of but six lines to one of his artists who has never been nearer to war than a sham fight at Easter, with the suggestion that something might be made of this. In a couple of days' time you have the incident fully illustrated, without the inconvenience of waiting for mails, or anything of that sort. If the artist is new to the work, and so far lost to all sense of what the public wants as to draw things as he thinks they ought to be, the editor will not scruple to tell him that if he can't clothe his figures more decently, and make them look

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more like they do on parade, and groom his horses better, and make them look more like chargers, he had better look elsewhere for commissions. The artist hereupon will take his drawing tailor's dummy chargers, and impossible costumesquely-burst. The editor is given a cheque, and you will do more ~~useless~~. He will go over to the enemy's lines for you, under a fire which would perforate boiler plate, or anything but a journalistic hide, and bring back real pictures of Boer life in the trenches—but always, mind you, either “drawn on the spot” or “from material supplied by an eye-witness.” If there is anything wrong with the picture, you must put it down to the eye-witness, who, of course, is not always absolutely reliable. I have known cases in which men were conducted into the Boer lines, blindfolded, and led back in the same condition, but this fact did not prevent them furnishing to the special artist in London, by telepathy, the most minute particulars of all that had occurred.

But you are mortally sick of the subject by this time. No? You want to know the



The Modern Correspondent

worst? Then just take another toothful, and I'll tell you in half-a-dozen words how the common or garden correspondent leads you astray. His are rather errors of omission than commission. He tells you half the truth—not the whole, and nothing but. You see, the troops won't play up to the special artist; they insist on spreading themselves out at twenty or thirty-pace intervals when they storm kopjes, so as to reduce the risk of being shot, instead of bunching up together in picturesque groups, and the Boers object to waiting about in their trenches to be bayoneted, as the artist thinks they ought to do; consequently a fight usually spreads itself over perhaps ten or twelve miles of country, and the ordinarily conscientious correspondent can't be in more than two places at once. But, you say, he can get his information like the special artist—from eye-witnesses. Of course he can, and of course he does, but everything depends upon the selection he makes. Do you know there are actually at this time in the British Army officers who will sometimes so far forget themselves as to crack up their own regiments! It's an absolute fact. But can't the correspondent go to the Headquarter Staff and get an authentic account of what he didn't happen to see? Yes, he can, but they give



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him dry details, which he won't have at any price. He knows that you want something more exciting, and he is there to do his duty by you.

CHAPTER XXIV

ANOTHER EXTRACT FROM MY DIARY

“*VREDEFORT, August 1st.*—By a route roughly approximating the outline of a badly-drawn map of Australia we have come back to within a few miles of the spot where we camped on the 24th May last—ten weeks ago; and if appearances go for anything we are just getting ready for another start. They are refitting the whole corps and making a desperate attempt to collect its scattered units. During the march from here to here, covering a distance of something close upon 1000 miles, we have dropped our sick and wounded at various points for medical treatment, under the impression that they would rejoin the regiment immediately they recovered. But experience has proved that when once a man is left behind on the road we seldom or never see him again. He is absolutely lost to the regiment. Probably he has been invalided home. We have no means of telling, and, unless he is seriously ill or

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dead, his case is not officially reported by the Medical Officer. We are not getting any further draft from home, consequently our ranks are gradually less. One can and the regiments complain of, up recently what are called a squadron of stragglers, for example, is required for a particular piece of work, say at Kroonstad. The Military Commandant there sends round an officer to rope in all the stray men he can find about the place. Some of them have just come out of hospital, others have been sent down for remounts, others for stores, possibly a few for mails. They are all gathered into this officer's net and handed over to some brigadier as a composite regiment. This happened in the case of about 100 of the N.S.W. Mounted Rifles under Lieutenant Learmonth, who was sent down from Pretoria to Kroonstad for remounts.

"The refitting even of a regiment is not a matter which takes hours or days. Generally it is a case of weeks and weeks of hard work. There are so many regiments needing rehabilitation about the same time. The nearest ordnance stores happen to be near Bloemfontein. There, just outside the city, stands a

Another Extract from My Diary

little cluster of canvas shops, which provide almost everything that the soldier requires on service. It is a sort of *al fresco* Westbourne Grove, and the Government is the Whiteley. They don't take cash, but nothing is issued without the production of some formidable document, signed and countersigned, initialed and counter-initialed. In one tent you will find blankets, horse-rugs, picketing ropes; in another tinned meat, emergency rations, biscuits. A third is devoted to men's clothing. You have to go to a fourth for boots, and so on. And outside every tent, from dawn to dark, you may see twenty or thirty men all waiting admission, and all provided with orders. If the Quarter-master happens to be pressed for time he will probably split up his requisition into ten or twelve parts, and send ten or twelve men to wait their turn at the various depots. Occasionally they have to wait more than twelve hours before anyone can find time to attend to them.

"This is probably why Colonel de Lisle has taken advantage of the spell at Vredefort to despatch Colonel Knight, Lieutenant M'Glenn, the Quarter-master and 100 of the rank and file to Bloemfontein. The sick and other details are proceeding as far as Kroonstad for hospital treatment, remounts, etc. The Colonel and Quarter-master are instructed to make every effort to collect all corps' details,

Australia at the Front

and arrange for the necessary remounts, in order to permit of their once more joining the command. Lieutenant M'Glinn, who has been specially selected for his duty, is to refit the whole corps, doesn't look reverse. The other side-effect being, that he was at Heidelberg, who had disovered General Hutton. General Hamilton, I understand, has since been given command of quite a new brigade, and is now operating somewhere near Pretoria. General Hutton is also supposed to be somewhere in that locality, although we find it very difficult to ascertain anything of what is going on outside our own camp. We haven't even seen General Hutton since leaving Kroonstad about the middle of May, although we are supposed to belong to his brigade. But commands out here are shuffled up so frequently and so rapidly that our case is far from being singular. In fact, it is a wise man who knows his own brigadier. If you should happen to question twenty Tommies indiscriminately, you would probably find that not more than ten of them knew to what corps they belonged, and even these would be doubtful as to their own commanding officers.

Another Extract from My Diary

"We happened to be at Frankfort when Hector Macdonald's Highland Brigade marched in from Heilbron. They were loudly cheered by our men as they passed through. They brought over two wagon-loads of mails, but none for us; the majority of us haven't had a line from home since leaving Bloemfontein; the men were fearfully disappointed. Another four or five days' march brought us to Reitz, which is due south from Frankfort, and half way to Bethlehem, our next halting-place. We reached the latter township on the 9th, and remained there until the 15th. It is a pretty little town, about the size of Heilbron, with a fine church, and boulevarded streets, but when we entered, the place wore a forlorn, deserted look. We found that Generals Paget and Clements had reached there before us and cleared the Boers out before them. We learnt from the residents that Clements sent word into the town, giving them two hours to clear out before he commenced shelling. Precisely to the hour he landed a shell clean through the iron roof of a house on the outskirts of the town.

"The stores here, as they had been in the other towns through which we passed, were very little use to us. The Boers had cleaned them out of everything which by any possible chance could have ministered to our comforts. In camp we suffered considerably from the

Australia at the Front

absence of firewood and decent water, but every effort was made to ward off the ever-increasing grip which enteric is getting as the season progresses. The water-carts were sent nearly three a supply of were kept s these extra developed r

m camp to insure water. The lines an, and, thanks to ry few cases have

"Nearing a warm quart wagons had in the roadside in order to allow the mules to be watered. The grass here was waist deep and very dry. Suddenly, over a rise, appeared a rapidly-moving wall of flame, and the wind was bringing it in our direction. Every man turned out with bag or blanket, or something of the sort with which to extinguish the fire. Those of the wagons which were almost ready to inspan were immediately got under way and galloped through the line of fire into the cool but charred patch beyond. Neither mules nor horses take kindly to this process. I remember near Roodpoort, on the evening as we took possession of that town, we met such another obstacle. The whole of the regiment went through the flames at a hand gallop, but even then the horses' fetlocks and legs were completely singed. While the mules were passing through the furnace, and the niggers



Drawn by Norman H. Hardy

Sketch by Frank Wilkinson

A WARM COMFORT

Australia of the Frost

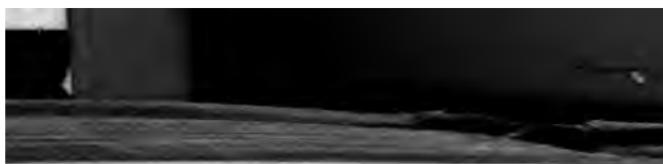
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Another Extract from My Diary

were inspanning the rest, our men had managed practically to get the fire under, but by some means it crept round and took us in the flank. Two wagons in course of being inspanned suddenly found themselves enveloped in flames fully four feet high. The mules plunged and kicked, tangled themselves into knots with the harness, and the majority of them had to be shot. They were horribly burnt.

"After leaving Reitz we made a reconnaissance in force in the direction of Swarbert's Nek. The passage was through a formidable-looking range of mountains towards Senekal; this we took on our way back to the railway line, while Hector Macdonald went in the opposite direction to Harrismith. A Yeomanry officer, wounded, and the bodies of four of the Yeomanry were found near a table-topped kopje which had been pluckily but unwisely attacked by thirteen of them. Those who were not killed or wounded were taken prisoners. Before leaving Bethlehem it became necessary to send a large convoy back to Lindley for supplies, and our regiment was called upon to contribute its quota to the escort. Colonel de Lisle asked for a squadron, leaving it to the Officer Commanding to determine which. At that time the majority of us were under the impression that once they reached the railway line they would be sent



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down to the base, and as most of them have had quite enough of this hunt through the country after De Wet, there was some competition as to who should go. Lots were drawn and the task fell to 'C' Squadron. Convoy and escort left for Lindley with the object of going on to Kroonstad. Our men were highly pleased with the prospect of getting back to civilisation. But on the 24th of this month they turned up once more near Vrededorf. They had not got as far as Kroonstad when they were snapped up by some Staff officer and attached to Little's Brigade. It appears that they had been fighting in defence of the convoy pretty well the whole period of the journey from Bethlehem. The remaining four squadrons of the regiment left Bethlehem at noon on the 16th and travelled some eight or ten miles before bivouacking for the night. Next morning a junction was effected with Paget's force.

"And now followed a series of forced marches for the purpose of trying conclusions with De Wet. Morning after morning we were roused out at four o'clock in the bitter cold and pitch dark. The regiment and transport invariably moved off between five and five-thirty, just as dawn was coming up. Instead of twelve and fifteen miles a day we were doing an average of twenty, with an occasional twenty-five, and that

Another Extract from My Diary

means coming into camp each night considerably after sunset, when it is impossible to pick your ground. Three days out from Bethlehem we were engaged in a smart action with De Wet's rearguard at a place called Palmietfontein, half way between there and Senekal. Palmietfontein is the name of a farmhouse. Probably you won't find it marked on the map. New South Wales and Western Australia kept pretty well within range of De Wet's rearguard for the greater part of the day, and harassed him considerably. It is impossible to say what loss he sustained, but at the close of the day the N.S.W. casualty list showed Privates Bennetts, Biddel and Joseph Palazzi killed, while Lieutenant Tooth and Sergeant Nicholson were wounded. Tooth's wound was slight, the bullet passing through the fleshy part of his thigh. Nicholson's nose was rather badly shattered. The West Australians lost even more heavily, Major Moor, the Commanding Officer, and several men were shot dead near a stone kraal, having reached within forty yards of the enemy. They played with some success the game which the Queenslanders started early in the campaign—that is, they held up their helmets on their rifles above cover, while their comrades shot the unsuspecting Boers who were firing at the helmets. One of the enemy thus despatched we found



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with a bandolier full of soft-nosed bullets. A party went out to bring the bodies into camp at midnight, and just before daylight next morning a mournful little funeral procession might have been discerned wending its way to the top of an adjacent rise. The surpliced chaplain, Father Patrick, led the way, followed by a firing-party, and Palazzi's remains were laid to rest by lantern light. A wooden cross was erected over the grave. At daylight Father Patrick, accompanied by a small party, went out some considerable distance and buried the remains of Private Biddel, who, we found, had been shot through the thigh either with an expansive or explosive bullet. Over his grave was also erected a cross, and Private Bennett's body was laid alongside that of his comrade.

"And so for the time short rations and other discomforts were forgotten until, on the 24th, we sighted Vredefort. Another fight took place with De Wet round here, but the regiment was not brought into action. Kitchener's Horse succeeded in capturing five wagons and fifteen prisoners, some of whom were wearing portions of our khaki uniform. De Wet has now retired beyond Vredefort, and occupied a strong position in a range of kopjes to the east. It is understood that Broadwood, the latest Brigadier-General, to whom we have been attached during the



Drawn by Norman H. Hardy

Sketch by Frank Wilkinson

A BATTLEFIELD BURIAL



Another Extract from My Diary

course of our chequered career, will sit tight here for at least a week or ten days while dispositions are being made by the other columns for another of those time-honoured 'enveloping' movements. This rest for both men and horses will be keenly appreciated. People at home can have but a faint idea of what is involved by a series of forced marches on three-quarter rations in a cold climate like this, and I can't give any idea of it in mere words. However, the regiment, tattered and hungry and tired, has reached here safely, and men are now looking forward to warm clothing and letters from home."

CHAPTER XXV

THE BIVOUAC

THE ADJUTANT. Any luck to-day, youngster ?

THE SUB. Not much, sir ; only an historic triangle used years ago to ring in Dutch independence.

THE QUARTER-MASTER. Did anyone see you take it ?

THE SUB. Of course ; it wasn't a shop with a side door.

THE ADJUTANT. What did you pay for it ?

THE SUB. I'm afraid to say how much. Of course you have to pay a decent price if you want a relic worth having.

THE Q.-M. We know all about that. How much ?

THE SUB. Half-a-crown (*ribald laughter*). You needn't laugh so consumedly. I've seen most of you pay for things sometimes.

THE Q.-M. Of course we do, always ; and even if we haven't got the money we give receipts.

The Bivouac

THE CHAPLAIN. That reminds me. I heard the other day that you had taken the major portion of a flock of sheep, given the owner one shilling and ninepence on account, and told him to call on the C.I.V.s for the balance.

THE Q.-M. Oh ! Padre ! How could you believe such a thing of me ?

THE CHAPLAIN. I'm afraid some of you fellows are no better than you ought to be. Do you know that a sergeant of "Q" Squadron came up to me most mysteriously in a store in town the other day and asked how I was going to get my stuff away.

THE SUB. What did you tell him ?

THE CHAPLAIN. The front door, of course. He seemed quite disappointed ; thought I ought to have discovered some back entrance.

[Laughter.]

THE Q.-M. See the force of a bad example. Now when I want any stores or curios of any kind—

AN ORDERLY (*who has just sprung from nowhere in particular, suddenly breaks into the circle—he carries a long coffin-like bundle done up in a horse blanket*). I've got it, sir.

OMNES. Got what ?

THE Q.-M. Something for me. (*Aside*) Take it away, you idiot. Do you want the whole camp to see it ?

The Bivouac

OMNES. Tell us about it.

THE SUB. Well, they invited me to dine with them one night. My horse, which was branded on the fore-hoofs, was hitched up to a peg in front of the tent where we dined. About nine o'clock, when I went to mount him, I found that someone had substituted an old broken-down Argentine. Of course I noticed the difference at once, but could not find my own horse anywhere in the lines. Finally I took a lantern round and examined the hoofs of every animal in camp. Yes, I found him at last. His old brand had been almost but not quite obliterated with a file, and a new regimental brand burnt in on top of it. That's playing it a bit low down on a guest, eh ?

THE COLONEL. By the way, Quarter-master, did you get much forage on the road to-day ?

THE Q.-M. I managed to get four wagon-loads, sir, but the Brigade Supply Officer came up and took possession.

THE COL. Bother those Imperial officers ; they seem to expect us to do all the foraging for the entire column. I wonder where they would be if their horses had to depend upon them entirely.

THE ADJUTANT. Did you hear, sir, how our wagons were messed up at the Drift to-night, about five miles from camp ?

THE COL. No !

Australia at the Front

THE ADJUTANT. The Divisional Transport Officer lost his head completely. Three lines of wagons converged towards the Drift on the far side, and instead of letting one column cross at a time he sent our wagons up into three batches, with the result that the second batch couldn't find any place of the first when it got through, and the herd wandered about for hours looking for the other two batches. We were three hours late in settling down for the night, and some of the wagons haven't been found yet. I have just sent an officer back along the road to look for them.

THE SUB. Poor chap. I don't envy him his job. He won't get back before daylight. Colonel, do you know what all that firing was about in our rear this morning?

THE COL. I've got a shrewd suspicion. It occurred at a farmhouse we passed on the left yesterday afternoon. An officer reported to me that there was forage to be had there, so I determined to send a few men up for it at daybreak this morning, just before we started. When we called yesterday afternoon there was only a "widow" lady there, but during the night her husband and a few friends must have come back, for I hear that immediately our men approached they were fired upon from the farm. The General sent over some Rimington Scouts to clear the Boers out and burn down the farm.



Drawn by Norman H. Hardy

THE DECOR

'Australia at the Present'

Sketch by Frank Wilkinson

To face page viii





The Bivouac

THE ADJUTANT. Talking of farms, what became of that wildebeeste I saw in camp the other day?

THE Q.-M. I heard Captain Blank say that it wouldn't lead behind the wagons. Some of the men managed to get a head rope on it, but it tore several picket pegs out of the ground before they succeeded in quieting it. I believe they branded it on the hind quarter with the idea of sending it home to the Zoo.

THE ADJUTANT. But it wouldn't lead?

THE SUB. Either that, or the Provost-Marshal stepped in and ordered us not to take it on. Provost-Marshal are an awful nuisance on service; they get first show at everything and then come down with a bang on anybody who shows similar enterprise. At one time we used to be able to get a few things for ourselves by nipping into a new town before the crowd came. Now the Provost-Marshal always gets there first and closes all the stores until he and the Supply Officer have commandeered what they want for the column.

THE Q.-M. I have found it a good plan to march straight into a store and put a sentry on the door until you have been served.

THE SUB. I call that pure cheek. I say, old chap, I wish you'd remember to get me some baking powder the next time you get into a store.

Australia at the Front

THE Q.-M. Baking powder! Why, I haven't seen any for months. My man has been using Enos's Fruit Salt since we left Kroonstadt. It's an awfully good substitute.

THE COL. That reminds me; I have asked a friend to dine with us to-morrow night; see what you fellows can do in the way of a decent meal for him.

THE Q.-M. By Jove! we'll bring out that table I picked up on the road the other day.

THE CHAPLAIN. I like that term "picked up."

THE SUB. Don't quibble, Padre. I fancy I've got a goose left that we might put in the pot for to-morrow.

THE Q.-M. And I've got a sucking-pig.

THE COL. We *are* in luck. You had better send a party out for some wood to cook with. By the way, how are those new black boys shaping?

THE Q.-M. Very well, sir, but the older ones are getting rather restive. Some of them are continually pestering me to be paid off so that they can go back to their homes.

THE SUB. Yes, sir; and do you know how he gets round them? He forks out a ragged bit of paper and reads them a long imaginary letter from Lord Roberts, beginning "My dear Blank," and ending, "Yours truly, ROBERTS."

THE COL. What does he put in between?

The Bivouac

THE SUB. Oh, something to the effect that "I (meaning Roberts) have watched the conduct of your black boys very carefully for a long time, and have every reason to be proud of them. They are lending the British Army valuable assistance in subjugating the Boers, and I (still meaning Roberts) hope soon to be able to let them get back home." It goes down wonderfully well every time.

THE CHAPLAIN. Has anyone heard lately of Lieutenant — ?

THE ADJUTANT. Poor fellow, he was in the last stages of enteric when I heard from Bloemfontein last, but that is quite two months ago. Anything may have happened since then.

THE COL. I must really see if we can't do something about our mails. We ought to hear about them when we get to our next camp. We don't know what is going on in the outside world. Well, I think I'll turn in now. You fellows want all the sleep you can get too; we must be off before daylight in the morning. Good-night!

OMNES. Good-night, sir!

THE Q.-M. Now I must go and issue a rum ration or there'll be a row.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE "BUSHIES"

I HAVE known the Australian Bushman for years—as he exists on his native heath. He is not a "Bushranger" in our sense of the word ; neither is he an aboriginal, as some people seem to imagine. The Sydney *Daily Telegraph* correspondent, who accompanied the first lot round by way of Beira, records his impression of them. He says :—

"As an Englishman I have derived much pleasure from the study of the Bushman, and after two months' intercourse I have come to the conclusion that he is one of the best fellows in the world—and this after he had laughed me to scorn for drinking tea with milk, and had been unsympathetically mirthful over my ineffectual effort to make "damper," or the tasty "devils in the coals." He is a tall, raw-boned, good-natured beggar ; he can make tea in a period an ordinary man would be striking a match ; he can ride horses that tie themselves up into knots and buck

The "Bushies"

with great suddenness and power; he can swear so that I have seen regular Tommies stand agape in awesome admiration. With a sick comrade he is tender as a child; he is the sort of stuff that heroes are cut from, and when a buck crosses his path within eyeshot he fears not God or the game laws."

Unfortunately, there would appear to have been some difficulty with his officers, several of whom, in Rhodesia, were chosen by a committee. Colonel Carew, their Brigadier, in an interview on the subject, is thus represented:—

"What do I think of the Bushmen?" he said, sweeping a pile of returns off a chair and motioning me to a seat. "They are great, and I am just as proud of my command as I can possibly be. They want a little training, but they are wonderfully adaptable, and they can ride. Look at that fellow"—a mounted man of the Victorians was tearing past the office, going for all he was worth—"I can't get the beggars to walk their horses; but really they are awfully good, and they endure any amount of hardship without complaining. They are just the fellows for campaigning in Rhodesia."

"What about the officers?"

The Colonel froze instantly, for your Imperial officer will not readily discuss the faults and failings of his *confrères*. "The officers

Australia at the Front

are all right. There has been some slight bother with one or two, but nothing to speak of. They want training. Some of the officers are splendid. I could not wish for better, and the majority are anxious to learn."

During the early stages of the war the men were not at all pleased with the turn events took. "It must be borne in mind," says the beforementioned correspondent, "that the force assembled between Beira and Buluwayo has had absolutely the hardest time that any force has had, be they Colonial or otherwise. They have had a longer time on ship-board than any of their comrades with the southern force. They have dragged out a dreary and soul-sickening existence in the fever swamps of the Portuguese territory. They have been bucketed up to Marendellas in shockingly slow stages, and have trekked a twenty-five days' march from that camp to Buluwayo, and it says much for men, undisciplined, untrained soldiers, that their behaviour has been so exemplary. It speaks well for the splendid Imperialistic patriotism of these corps that they can come out of the rough and tumble of campaigning with nothing stronger than a feeling of intense disgust that fighting is to be denied them. Whether it is a fact that the fighting is all finished is yet to be learnt. In some quarters it is believed that the war is by no means over,

The “Bushies”

and that if Sir Frederick Carrington moves his men into the Transvaal the Bushman will come to his own, which is good cover and steady shooting.”

Personally I have not seen them at work in South Africa, but the chaplain with the contingent has sent an interesting account of their first action, from which I quote the following:—

“*RUSTENBURG, July 9th, 1900.*—Our ‘Bushies’ have had a fight with the Boers, and acquitted themselves well and bravely. We engaged three or four hundred of them on Saturday morning, and drove them out of Rustenburg. We had two men killed, three men and one officer wounded. It is reported that twenty-eight Boers were killed, but nothing certain is known as yet. We also took about eight prisoners. The following is a diary of our journey and fight:—

“*Saturday, June 30th.*—Rode from Mafeking with Father Timoney, and Green, and about 300 N.S.W. troops. Spent a horrible night on the trek; two hours’ sleep on a wagon. The worst night I ever spent in my life.

“*Sunday, June 1st.*—Started at daylight. Very cold ride; my remount, a strong South American pony. Rode to Ottoshoop, eight miles from Mafeking. Boer farming village. Beautiful farming country. Almost the first

Australia at the Front

we saw in the Transvaal—some beautiful gum trees. Rejoined part of Squadron, under Pockley and Christie. Colonel Holdsworth is taking us on to General Baden-Powell.

“Monday, July 2nd.— Came from Ottoshoop to Zeerust, a beautiful Transvaal country. Passed several farms and saw some Boers (peaceful). Found Machattie, Battye, and Mullins. Camped on a hill. Rained heavily during the night; slept in the open, many of the men soaked through.

“Tuesday, July 3rd.— Found Captain Dibbs waiting with the news that I was in orders to proceed with ‘B’ and ‘C’ Squadrons to Rustenburg, as some thousands of Boers were expected to attack ‘A’ Squadron.

“Wednesday, July 4th.— Everybody greatly excited at the chance of having some fighting. Heard that Boers had occupied Rustenburg, and that our Colonel and Colonel Hoare were falling back upon us.

“Thursday, July 5th.— Rose at 4.30 a.m. and trekked till 8.30. Cantered eighteen miles and met long convoy with Colonel Airey and ‘A’ Squadron; also some detachments of Colonel Plumer’s force under Colonel Hoare; also two or three guns (12-pounder, 7-pounder, and Maxim). We joined in their retreat and camped with our own wagons at Monaco River. Boers were threatening Rusten-

The "Bushies"

burg, and Baden-Powell's orders were to fall back.

"Friday, July 6th.—Started off at 9.30 a.m. Rode on towards Rustenburg. At noon arrived at Eland's River, a small British fort on the hill. A few of Colonel Plumer's men there. Colonel Holdsworth telephoned to Rustenburg, and learned that the Boers were threatening the town. Twenty Boers were at Eland's River last night. Started off for Rustenburg (thirty-seven miles). Pushed on quickly. Travelled till 4 a.m. Rested half an hour and pushed on towards Magalo's Nek, a dangerous pass six miles from Rustenburg. All men excited at the prospect of a fight. 'A' Squadron was left behind at Eland's River. Colonel Airey, Colonel Holdsworth, with the 12-pounder and the Maxim, the ambulance mule wagon and a few other wagons, the Staff, and 'B' and 'C' Squadrons went on.

"Saturday, July 7th (the day of battle).—Pressed on to the Nek. Everyone fully expected a fight. Arrived at the pass at sunrise. Advance guard on the alert. Went up into the pass very carefully. Found no signs of the enemy, and got through in safety, to the delight of everyone. Left Lieutenant Christie and twenty men to guard the pass. Pushed on towards Rustenburg. Soon after saw the town in the distance. About a mile

Australia at the Front

from the town we heard cannon roaring. Pushed on at a canter. Found the enemy in position near the town, storming the gaol, where Major Tracey and about sixty of Plumer's men were the only garrison. The British flag at the Landrost's office had been torn down. 'B' Squadron, under Lieutenant Eckford, took the right wing; 'C' Squadron, with Captain Machattie, took the left; Captain Robertson, with the advance guard, went straight on. All advanced quickly across the plain under a hot rifle and pom-pom fire. The Boers ran round the back of the town towards Pretoria. Some got to a kopje, but the wonderful charge of the Bushmen quickly dislodged them—a very smart piece of fighting. Everybody pleased, Poor Trooper Russell shot dead through the heart; also Corporal Murray, who was found by Boardman and myself. Lance-Corporal Legh shot in the groin and Trooper Fimester shot in the back. Captain Machattie wounded in the chest and arm. Boardman and I galloped in after the squadrons, and, separating, looked for the wounded men. The Boers, two or three hundred strong, retreated. Our 12-pounder was placed on a kopje to the east of the town. The fight lasted from eleven till twelve o'clock. We were thus just in time to relieve Rustenburg. In the afternoon got a little sleep. Dined in the town with Mac-

The "Bushies"

hattie and Pockley, and camped under a tree. The wagons arrived at night. We have accomplished a wonderful march—forty-eight miles from Friday morning to Saturday morning. No sleep, and a battle at the end. Rustenburg is eighty miles from Zeerust, which we left on Wednesday morning. Wonderful how we arrived just in time to clear the Boers out of the place. About twelve Boers taken prisoners, and twenty-eight reported to have been killed. Baden-Powell expected to-night from the east.

"Monday, July 9th.—Baden - Powell, Colonel Plumer, and 1000 men, with six guns, arrived on Sunday night. On Monday a patrol of our men went out in the direction taken by the enemy. The advance guard came into contact with the enemy's outposts, and some skirmishing resulted. Two of our men were wounded and one taken prisoner. It is reported that seven Boers were killed and several wounded. Both parties retreated."

Actually the first casualty among our Bushmen was the result of an accident somewhere on the railway line near Beira. Trooper Meyers, passing between some supply trucks to reach the opposite side of the platform, was suddenly knocked down and run over. None of his comrades noticed the accident. He lay alongside the line all night,

Australia at the Front

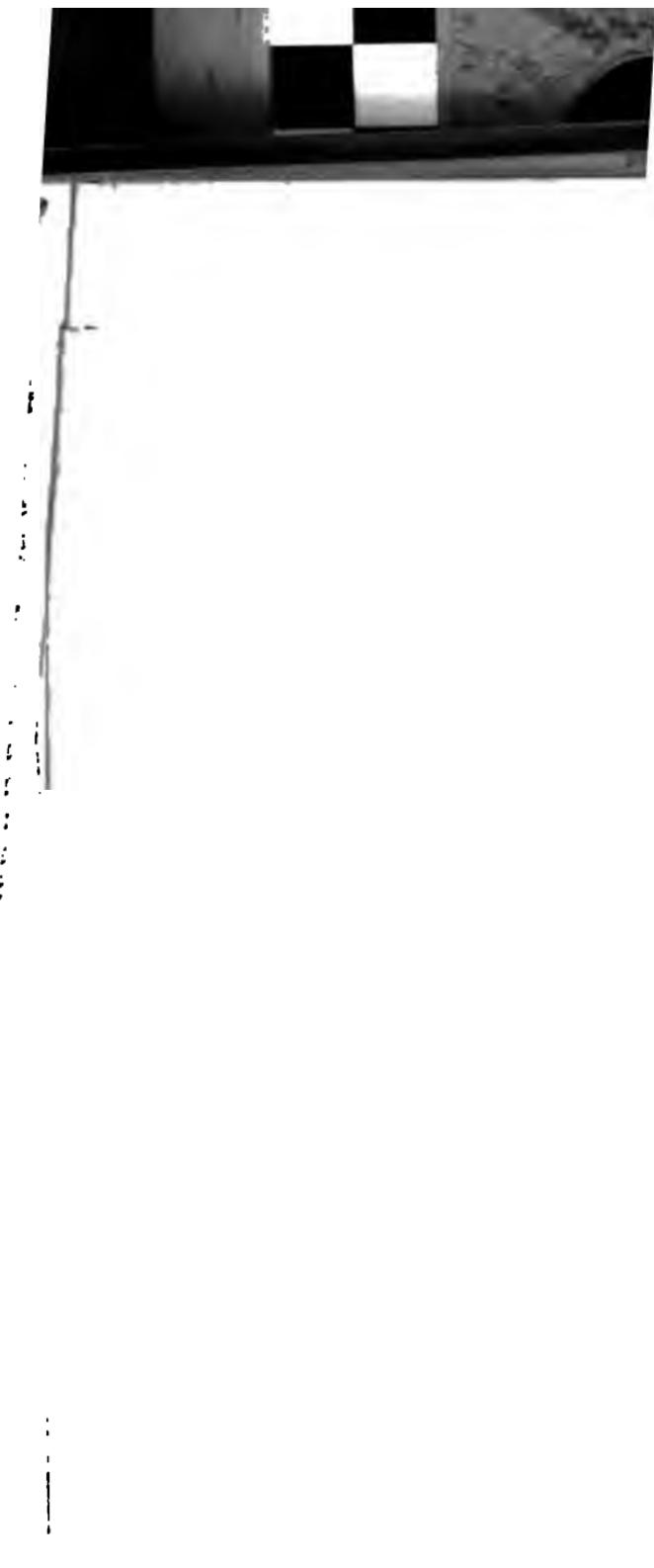
with both ankles and feet badly mangled, until a water-train happened along. He coo-eed to the driver, who placed him on the train and took him on to Umtali. The regiment had pulled up there for a few hours, just when Meyers was brought in, dying. He had shown great pluck and endurance. During the night he had removed his bandolier and coat, and finally his shirt. With the latter, torn into strips, he had bandaged his wounded members, but it was found necessary to amputate both legs. He died shortly after the operation.

From letters sent home to their friends in Australia by the Bushmen, I select the following:—

“Two things struck me very forcibly out here (Marendellas). One is that the only hotel seems to be built of grass and mud; and the other, that it is good fun to see the Imperial Yeomanry ride, as they fall at the rate of one a minute.”

“I expect we shall be here for twelve months. I would like a few months on my own account after the war is over to do a bit of prospecting.”

THE END.







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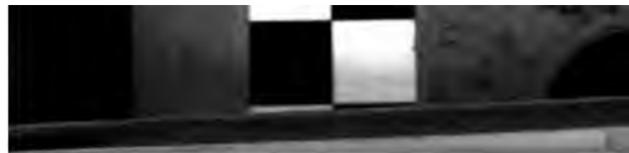
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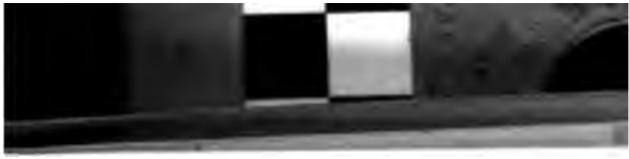
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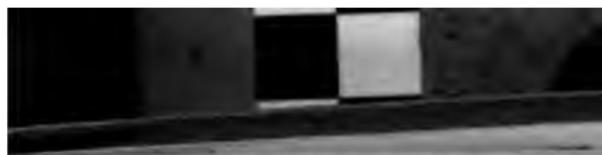
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